The MAN from RED-KEG

Eugene Thwing

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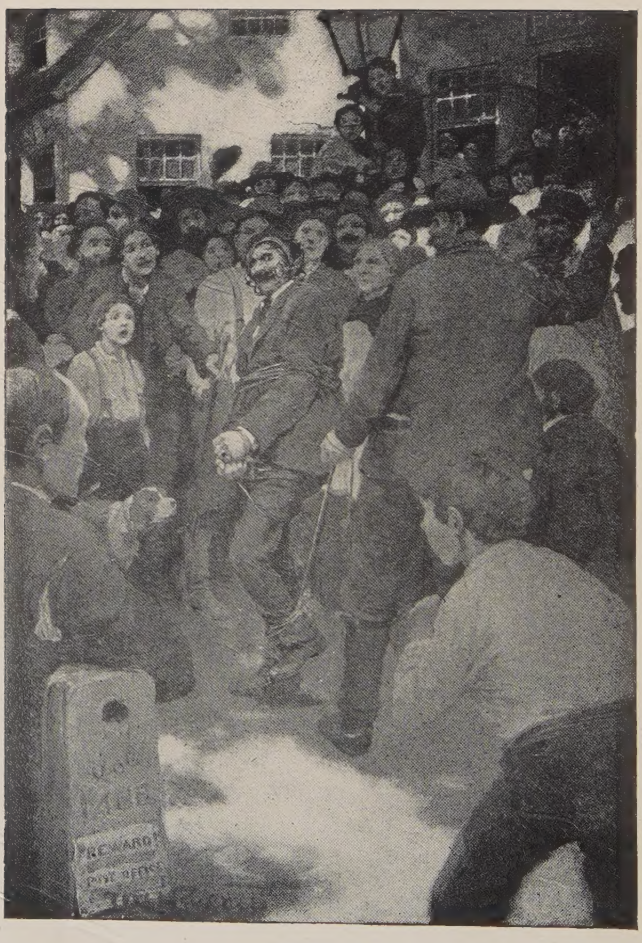

"'A rod an' a whip is near enough the same thing, . . . to satisfy the demands of Holy Writ, so here goes.'"

The Man from Red Keg

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By Walter H. Everett

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The Man From Red-Keg

CHAPTER I

William Harrington Bartley came earlier than usual to his little office on Benson Street. He was willing that his printers should work early and late—indeed, he expected it as a matter of course; but ease and the dignity of his position as editor and publisher had suggested his right to an extra hour or two in bed in the morning and nine o'clock as the proper time for his appearance at the office. This particular Wednesday morning, however, in violence of all custom, he was abroad with the earliest risers soon after daylight. To be sure, there was some commotion in the streets because of the Post Office robbery the night before, just discovered. Bartley, like the typical newspaper editor, had a "nose for news." His scent was trained especially for sensations, or anything smelling of scandal. Just now he had been talking with the crowd around the Post Office, asking questions of all who knew anything about the affair, and of many who did not, volunteering suggestions of his own, and dropping a hint here and there, or voicing some vague suspicion which might be counted on to travel and grow without further attention. When news was scarce, William Harrington Bartley was not the man to wait for it, he got abroad and made it. "My dear sir," he said once to a man who asked if a certain news item was true, "don't worry about that, if it's interesting to read."

It was still dusk as Bartley made his way through

his crowded printing room and unlocked the door of his little private sanctum in the farthest corner. Throwing off his coat, he lighted the lamp on his desk and pulled down the shades of both windows. His desk was covered with piles of old manuscripts, newspaper clippings, and letters. Seating himself in his revolving chair, he cleared a place in front of him by main force, crowding the editorial heaps back into the corners and under the pigeon holes. With a sudden impulse he rose and turned the key in his office door; then he took several packages and papers from his pocket, examined and sorted them carefully, put some of them in a little iron safe at one side of his desk, and returned the others to his pocket. A heap of blank paper lay near his elbow; he pulled it in front of him and began to write rapidly.

William Harrington Bartley was a pretty name, but little more. It looked well at the head of the editorial column of *Chips*, and was seldom seen elsewhere. It would be greeted with a stare of inquiry if pronounced aloud in public. Bill Bartley, however, or Bart, for short, was a name known everywhere and respected nowhere in Midland County. No one disputed his education or ability; if they were very much less, most who knew him would have had cause to be thankful. Considerably under the average height, he was nevertheless handsome, or at least striking, in personal appearance. His figure was erect and well proportioned, his features regular, with a suggestion of strength, insolence, and indulgence. His thick black hair and luxuriant mustache were trained to the most fetching curl, and from under heavy eyebrows a pair of piercing blue-gray eyes smiled with mock politeness, or flashed a reckless defiance, as the mood of the moment prompted. There were men and women almost without number who had grievances against Bartley and against his *Chips;*

but rarely could anyone be found ready to enter the lists against him in single combat of word or wit. His command of sarcasm and invective was so sure, and his manner of attack so reckless and relentless, and often so indecent, that many an injury was passed by in grim silence simply because retaliation might invite a worse attack.

An hour slipped by while Bartley worked at his early task. Now and then he snatched a written sheet from the pile before him and, with an impatient oath, tore it into pieces and threw them into his basket. Suddenly he heard someone coming up the stairs from the street. Rising hastily, he blew out the light in his lamp, and pulled up the window shades. The morning sunlight flooded the tiny sanctum. With the same hasty movement, but noiselessly, he turned the key in his office door and opened it, reaching at the same time for his overcoat, which he quickly slipped on. A young woman, jauntily attired, came into the printing room from the outer hall.

"Oh, it's you, is it? Good morning. I thought I heard someone coming up stairs just as I came in," and Bartley began leisurely and somewhat ostentatiously removing his overcoat. "I'm rather behind on copy this week; thought I'd get an early start today. Have you heard anything new, my dear, that would make a good story?"

"Humph! It's likely you've heard what I've heard this morning", replied the young woman, making her way familiarly into the editor's private office as she removed her hat and wraps. "So—o! Just came in, did you? thought you'd get an early start! My lands, Bart, how that lamp smells! I declare, if the wick ain't smoking yet; been smoking all night, I suppose," and the girl laughed scornfully as she prinked her hair before the little mirror in the corner.

Bartley looked at her sharply for a moment, then he laughed.

"You're too smart, Nell; a regular female detective. That comes from associating with me. If you keep on——"

"Oh, shut up, Bart, or talk sense. What do you want to lie for, and what on earth have you been doing, scribbling here by lamplight in the morning?"

"Easy, Nell; here come Jake and Joe. Where the devil is that devil? He ought to have had a fire going before now."

As he spoke, the boy came running up the stairs and bounced noisily into the outer office. He stopped in surprise at sight of the editor.

"Here! you dirty young scalawag! What do you mean by sneaking in to work at this time o' day? Step lively, now, and get my fire going, or I'll throw you out the window. Do you want me to freeze, I'd like to know?"

"Yes, sir; right away, sir," replied the boy, hurrying to the wood box. Nell Tompkins laughed. "Yes, sir," she repeated, imitating the boy's manner, "he wants you to freeze right away, sir. I'll bet I could name some friends of yours who would like to see you roast; —there, don't get mad; I ain't telling you anything new." Then she added in a lower tone, "What have you been up to this morning that you was trying to hide? that's what I'm dying to know."

"My dear, you really must be patient," Bartley said in a half whisper, glancing toward his foreman, Jake Crawford, and young Chabington, who were standing near his office putting on their aprons. "When that rascal of a boy gets my fire started, so that I can shut the door, I'll tell you about it."

Bartley's "devil" soon had a wood fire roaring in the round stove in the little editorial sanctum and a pile

of split logs laid nearby; then he turned his attention to the box stove in the outer office.

"Well?" persisted the young woman, throwing herself into the big easy chair which Bartley kept in his office for his own indulgence during his moments of relaxation. He answered the query by tilting himself back in his chair, kicking the door shut, hooking his thumbs into the armholes of his figured waistcoat, and staring at Nell with a curious mixture of insolence, admiration, and calculating uncertainty.

The scrutiny appeared to cause the girl no embarrassment nor annoyance. She recognized the admiration in his look and for the sake of that condoned the insolence. Nell Tompkins had been employed as compositor and general office assistant on Bartley's *Chips* for nearly a year, and in that time had established herself, or had been established by Bartley's favor, upon confidential terms with her employer, which made her acquainted with many of his affairs that were kept from the knowledge of the public. He found her cleverness a help to him in his schemes; and she tolerated and practiced a familiarity in conversation with him which caused the others of his office crew to cast meaning glances at one another when the editor's back was turned; yet none of them treated Nell with disrespect. She was a general favorite in the office and in the town, and notwithstanding her association with Bartley, she counted her admirers wherever she was known. Her beauty was of the "fetching" type, which needed all the little feminine tricks of adornment and "make up" to bring it to its fullest effectiveness, and so much of this art as lay within her power she employed to the full. Her light brown hair lay in waves on each side of her forehead and was confined in a stylish chignon at the back of her head; her eyes had acquired that dangerous, tantalizing habit of saying things that the mouth would

never admit, and though many an unconventional speech came from her pert rosy lips, her manner of uttering it made one think of its piquancy rather than its impropriety. She knew of a certain way to smile that brought a tempting little dimple into one cheek; therefore there was more dimple than spontaneity in most of her smiles; yet they were undoubtedly charming, and were sought for and bestowed with equal avidity. They gave pleasure alike to him who received and to her who gave. She yielded to no one of her admirers any exclusive favor. It pleased her to hold them all, even Bartley, just near enough and just far enough to tempt without granting. When any of them quarrelled about her, it simply added spice to her routine life. When Bartley's wife was mentioned, she curled her lips, and murmured, perhaps, "poor thing!" Her whole behavior spoke of unrestraint and vanity, yet an unquestioning confidence in her own ability to take care of herself.

As Bartley sat tipped back in his chair looking at her, she patted her hair into place first on one side, then on the other, gave her collar a little jerk, adjusted her skirt to a nicety, and bestowing upon her chief the sauciest look she could muster, exclaimed:

"Now, then, take a good look, and when you're through let me know if I'm all right, please."

"You're all right, Nell," exclaimed Bartley, with a laugh as he sat forward in his chair. "So much so, my dear, that I'm going to get reckless. How much do you get a week—nine dollars, isn't it?"

"Of course; you know that as well as I do."

"Yes, to be sure; but how would you like to make it twelve?" Bartley leaned a little closer, and spoke in a lower tone.

"Why, lovely!" This time the smile was surely spontaneous, regardless of the dimple.

"All right, we'll consider that settled, and here is

something on account of back pay," and Bartley handed her a crisp new greenback.

"Thanks! you're a jewel; but why——?"

Bartley leaned suddenly closer, and without an instant's warning, kissed her full on the mouth. Quick as he was, the stinging slap on his cheek came almost simultaneously with his kiss.

"Just don't be so fresh, Bill Bartley; now we'll consider *that* settled," exclaimed the girl indignantly. "You've got something up your sleeve, I know, all right; but it isn't *that*, not if I know it."

The editor let out an angry oath, then stopped short and glanced nervously at the door of his office. Evidently he was more concerned at the thought that the men outside might have heard the slap and the words which followed than that he had received the sting of them.

"Plague take it, Nell, I didn't think you were such a fool as to make a fuss over a little thing like that."

"You mean I'm not enough of a fool to suit you," replied the girl. "But, pshaw, you got your medicine, now let it drop. I'm waiting to hear your story."

Bartley shrugged his shoulders, glanced again at the door, and picked up several sheets of manuscript from his desk. "It *is* a story and a mighty good one," he said. "You heard that the Post Office was broken into last night and robbed of some $1,000 and a lot of mail matter?"

"Yes; what did you have to do with it?"

"Who said I had anything to do with it?" said Bartley sharply. "You don't want to go so fast, young lady; but I've got just this to do with it—I've found out by prompt and searching inquiries this morning some exceedingly important facts, and they'll make a big story for *Chips*. We've got to rush the paper to press and have it on the street tomorrow morning

before the excitement dies away. That's why I came here so early today. I've got the story written. Just see how it strikes you."

"Do you know who did it?"

"Well, of course I couldn't tell who they are, nor where they are, but I have a pretty straight clue, enough to put the law on their track."

"Well, why don't you do it, before they have a chance to get away?"

"My dear, I am publishing a paper for people to buy. It isn't likely I shall spoil the interest in my story by giving it away in advance. Let the authorities buy *Chips* if they can't get the facts for themselves. I'm mighty sure I don't owe them any special favors."

"That's so," laughed Nell; "they have been after you rather hard the past year. Well, go ahead."

Bartley cleared his throat, pulled down his fancy waistcoat with a quick jerk and read the following:

POST OFFICE ROBBED.

BOLD ACT OF DESPERADOES AROUSES MIDLAND.

THREE MASKED MEN GET AWAY WITH RICH PLUNDER.

NIGHT WATCHMAN TRICKED AND BRUTALLY HANDLED BY PERPETRATORS OF SENSATIONAL CRIME.

OUTLAWS SUPPOSED TO BE HIDING IN THE GREAT HUCKLEBERRY SWAMPS—VIGILANCE COMMITTEE ON THEIR TRAIL.

The boldest and most sensational crime which has stirred our town in years was discovered early Wednesday morning of this week. The Post Office was broken into by three masked desperadoes and robbed of money and postage stamps amounting to over $1,000, besides which a package of registered letters is missing.

There are many unusual circumstances connected with this crime which show the cleverness as well as the surprising and dare-devil bravado of the desperate gang. About one o'clock, Patrick Hogan, the faithful and usually efficient night watchman, was walking slowly along Main Street near the Post Office, when he

suddenly came upon a man lying full length upon the sidewalk with his head just inside a dark doorway. Pat, thinking the man had fallen into a drunken sleep, poked him with his foot to rouse him, but the man did not stir. Could it be that he was dead? Pat stooped over him to investigate. As he did so, something was suddenly slipped over his mouth from behind and fastened so tight that it was impossible to cry out. His mouth was forced open and filled by something solid in the gag, which effectually prevented him from making a sound. At the same instant his arms were seized in a vise-like grip and pinioned behind his back. All had happened so quickly that poor Pat had no opportunity to make the slightest resistance. As soon as he was secured, the man who had been lying on the sidewalk sprang to his feet, and Pat saw also the two men who had come upon him from behind. All three of the desperadoes were fully masked. Not one of them spoke a word. A revolver was pressed against the night watchman's forehead as a reminder of what would befall if he refused obedience; then the outlaws took his keys from him and led him into the Post Office, compelling him at the point of the pistol to select the right key for each door. Once inside, the burglars lit a dark lantern, placed Pat in a chair, to which they securely tied him, and two of them quickly began operations upon the safe, while the third rifled the cash drawer and mail bags. Nothing in the book and stationery store belonging to the postmaster seems to have been touched. A curious incident of the robbery which might have resulted in a tragedy occurred when the safe was blown open. After drilling and applying the powder and fuse, the men retreated to a safe distance to await the explosion, but, through accident it is to be hoped, they forgot to move Pat's chair out of harm's way. The poor fellow thought his last hour had come; he expected to be blown to pieces with the safe. Fortunately, he was only thrown over backward upon the floor as the charge exploded, and one of the men was considerate enough to set him upright again. He could see them in the partial light of their dark lantern as they took everything of value from the safe, including, as we have already said, over $1,000 in money and stamps, and a package of registered letters. Before they left, they examined the night watchman's bonds to make sure they would hold. Pat fixed in his mind as good a description of the men as possible, but they were careful to keep the light of their lantern turned away from themselves, which, with the fact that all of them wore masks, and never spoke a word aloud, made it difficult to get any general idea of them. Two important details were noted, however. One of the men had only three fingers on his right hand, while one of his companions was lame in his left foot. The only noticeable point with regard to the third was that he appeared to be half a head taller than the other two.

It was due to the alert and watchful eye of our public-spirited

citizen, Henry Farineau, that the robbery and the uncomfortable plight of the night watchman were so soon discovered. He was on his way to the livery stable to engage a rig for an early trip to the Red-Keg logging section when he noticed that the Post Office door was open and two or three of the windows were broken. He immediately gave the alarm, and with several other citizens entered the place and released the unfortunate Mr. Hogan, whose limbs were pitiably stiff and sore from the cruel cords which had held them for four hours. It was several minutes before the poor fellow could talk freely after the gag had been taken from his mouth; then his story revealed the details as we have already stated them. It is only fair to call attention right here to the fact, that Mr. Hogan should not be held in the least to blame for the robbery. The cleverly planned surprise, and the overpowering number of the thieves gave him not an instant for defense or resistance, and a single cry of alarm would have been his death warrant.

Needless to say, the whole town is wrought up to a high pitch of excitement and indignation by this high-handed crime in our midst, and speculation is rife as to who the perpetrators can be. All are agreed that they are some desperate gang of professionals, no doubt going from town to town for purposes of plunder. This conviction gained ground within a few hours after the crime was discovered, and coupled with it is the belief that the gang took refuge in the great huckleberry swamps to the north and west of Midland, where they could find cover until safe from pursuit. We ourself believe we happened upon an important clue which would tend to strengthen that theory. Late Tuesday night we had been looking up an item of more than usual interest and flavor (which will appear in *Chips* later), and was on our way home at about two o'clock, when on coming down Main Street near the cemetery we saw three men who crossed the road ahead of us, turned off up the railroad track, and were soon out of sight going West. Each man had what looked like a lumber-jack's kit on his back, so we thought no more of it at the time; but we did notice that one of the men limped slightly as he walked, and that one was considerably taller than the other two. These facts tally closely with the description given by the night watchman, and make it reasonably certain that the men we saw were the Post Office robbers making off with their plunder. Inquiry up the line has failed to bring information of any strangers coming in at Red-Keg, the present terminal of the railroad, and the inference is therefore unavoidable that the outlaws made for the dense huckleberry swamps. It is there that Sheriff Reon's posse and a citizen's vigilance committee, heavily armed, are looking for them. *Chips* joins with all lawabiding citizens in hoping that the villains will be captured and brought to justice.

"Well, how's that for the biggest piece of news *Chips*

has ever sprung on an eager public?" asked the editor, after waiting a moment for his assistant to volunteer some comment.

"It's interesting—if true," said Nell.

"Nonsense, girl! Will you never learn that the interest of a newspaper story does not depend on its truth? But of course it's true—true as the gospel, and the sooner we can get it into print and give it the benefit of the vast circulation of *Chips*, the truer it will be."

"You don't say!"

"Certainly; let the people alone in their ignorance a few hours, and they'll begin forming theories out of nothing; a little longer, and these theories will become facts. One fellow will make a guess and tell it to somebody; then it will be repeated as true information and every mother's son-of-a-gun will believe it. What does Shakespeare, or Moses say, my dear? 'All we, like sheep, have gone astray.' We've got to guide 'em straight, Nell, and *Chips* is cast for the part of shepherd in this act."

"But how did you get hold of so much exclusive information in so short a time, Bart? You must have been here as early as six o'clock this morning, and I heard Caleb Trimmer say the robbery wasn't discovered till five. My! but you've been busy."

"Ah, you must remember, Nell, that it is the newspaper man's business to get at the inside facts of a thing quickly. I pride myself that there are few men, if any, who can excel me in that respect; certainly not the old moss-back across the hall."

"Yes, and it's a newspaper man's business to know beforehand when such a thing is going to happen, so that he can get up at five o'clock in the morning, two or three hours before his usual time, to find out all about it, even though he didn't go to bed until after two o'clock the same morning."

Bartley stared at the girl and swore an ugly oath. "What are you driving at, young woman? Do you question the accuracy of my story?"

"Oh, not at all, Bart; for twelve dollars a week, I'll believe all the yarns you please to write; but are the people of Midland so fond of you that they will believe it, and not want to know more about that item you was looking for on Main Street at two o'clock this morning?"

"Confound your impudence, Nell; but maybe there's something in that last idea. Perhaps it would be better to make the story a little more impersonal. We can say that it comes from one of our most prominent citizens. That will——Well, what is it?"

Crawford, the foreman, poked his head into the office as he held the door ajar.

"Copy's all up—makes only three galleys—can't git the paper out tomorrow 'nless you keep the hook full 'n git another man at the case, 'n work tonight 'n the bargain."

"Can't get the paper out tomorrow!" roared Bartley, springing to his feet in a rage. "By——! you've got to get the paper on the street before noon tomorrow! Why didn't you say you wanted copy before setting up the last stickful? Here, take this; no, I've got to alter a few lines first. Here's a column of reprint. Cut it up and put it on the hook. Work tonight? Of course you'll work tonight—all night if necessary—and serve you right, too, for getting behind so——"

"That'll just about do, Mr. Bartley," interrupted Jake Crawford, angrily, yet trying hard to control himself. "If you want me to set another line in this office you've got to keep a half-way civil tongue. How am I going to set copy when I haven't got it? I asked you three times yesterday for copy, and you put me off with a few driblets. It's been the same way right along

—comin' up to day before issue and not half the paper set, 'cause we couldn't get copy; only this week it's worse. I don't mind the night work once a week, but I ain't goin' to stand around to be kicked 'cause the editor ain't ground out the copy."

Bartley's manner changed instantly. Always ready to rave, and swear, and bully over trifles when the offender was unable to defend himself, the first sign of defiance caused him to forego his bluster for something more dangerous. He smiled almost graciously, and his tones became quiet and deferential, but there was an unwholesome glitter in his eyes behind the smile.

"Pardon me, Mr. Crawford. I was not aware that you had appointed yourseslf as managing editor and honored me with a place as your assistant. Let me see"—he pulled out his watch—"it is now just twenty-three minutes of eight. I haven't much time to spare. Within three minutes you may apologize for your insolence and return to your frame; otherwise, at twenty minutes of eight I shall lay you on the floor in front of your frame with your head in your own tobacco juice."

The big printer glared in astonishment at the dapper little editor nearly a head shorter than himself and of seemingly slight build. As he gazed, amusement and anger struggled for control of his feelings. He had been with Bartley only about two months, and had been sworn at daily, but this was certainly a new style of bluff on the part of the little man. True, Crawford had never defied him before, but what of it? If Bartley wanted to fight, he could brush him off like a fly, or swat him like a mosquito. He was just beginning to laugh at the idea as he saw Bartley snap shut the case of his watch and put it into his pocket. The next instant—he really could not be sure just what happened—something struck him under the chin, his head flew back into a starry firmament, and then he felt him-

self sinking into darkness and oblivion. Some moments later—it seemed like hours—when he sat up close to his printing frame, and kicked away the overturned cuspidor, he began slowly to realize, with more wonderment than rage, that the "impossible" had really happened. He washed his head at the sink and went to work at his case without a word; but he was busy thinking.

Bartley had returned to his sanctum, and Nell followed him. As she did so, she noticed a letter on the floor behind his chair. The address caught her eye, and the instant her chief's back was turned, she picked up the letter and slipped it into her apron pocket.

"You must be crazy, Bart, to treat Jake that way," she exclaimed. "He didn't do a thing to deserve it."

"He was insolent. I have taught him his manners, that's all. I'll fire him as soon as I get this paper to press," retorted Bartley.

"You won't do anything of the kind, foolish!" replied the girl. "More than that you can thank your lucky stars if he doesn't quit of his own accord without waiting to get out the paper. He isn't the man to stand much bullying. I had to beg him to stay once before. I suppose I'll have to do it again. He's sweet on me, you know." She added the last with a malicious smile at Bartley.

"All the more reason why he's got to go," snapped the editor.

Nell laughed. "How silly you are, Bart. It wouldn't do the least good. Can't you see? You'd only have to get another man in his place, and he'd be just as likely to take a fancy to me as Jake was, and I—I'd help him if necessary. Better hold on to Jake while you've got him; and you'll have to get somebody to help out, too, just as Jake says."

"Who the devil can I get?" growled Bartley, ignor-

ing Nell's taunts because of his very inability to hold his own against her sharp thrusts. "I don't believe there's another comp. in town, outside of old man Brinton's office."

"Is that why you were so ready to fire Jake? I declare, you'd put the office out of business in no time if I wasn't here to take care of you. Why not get one of *The Pioneer* men for tonight? Any one of them would be glad enough of a little extra piece work."

"My dear girl, do you imagine for a moment that I'd set foot inside old Brinton's office asking favors? Not much. He and his whole crew——"

"What's the use of cutting off your nose to spite your face?" interrupted Nell. "If you don't want to ask them, I will. You'll never get the paper out tomorrow noon if you act like that."

"Humph! well, have your own way, if you're bound to; only don't ask that sneaking booby, Ned Jewel; I won't have him in the shop."

"I'll ask whoever I please and anybody I can get," replied Nell, with a toss of her head. "But I must look after Jake before he gets away, and I want a piece of that reprint copy, myself."

A little later when Bartley came out of his private office to go to breakfast he saw that all was serene and that the work of setting up *Chips* was going on as briskly as he could wish.

CHAPTER II

Nell Tompkins delighted in contrariness. The thing forbidden, or the thing unpopular, held a special attraction for her. It was this perverse trait which helped to keep her in *Chips'* office. Practically all the better element in Midland opposed Bartley and his paper, and he had been forced out of business several times by libel suits and criminal prosecutions. Once he had been driven from the town; but with a persistence worthy of a better enterprise, and with financial resources apparently unfailing, but puzzling to those who considered the matter, he returned to his office and started anew. Nell defied public opinion and earned her living setting type for *Chips*, though many of the things she set roused rebellion in her breast. The same defiance of the popular verdict, reinforced by her own kindness of heart, had prompted her to befriend openly the uncouth dwarf, Percy Ravenstock, and his old mother. Wherever the dwarf was known, he was feared because of his giant's strength, or suspected because of his silent, almost stealthy, habits, or ridiculed because of his ugliness and slow wit. Nell's utter disregard of all these things, and some casual kindness shown to the friendless old woman, his mother, had earned for her the dog-like devotion of the dwarf. Indeed, it was Nell's chief pleasure to win admirers everywhere, while doing violence to the opinions and rules of conduct which these very admirers held in common with a majority of the community.

The same contrariness made her desire most that which was withheld from her. The difficulty of possessing it put a keener edge to her desire. She had learned the

art of attracting admiration and had seldom employed it in vain. When she found the exception, she at once became more interested in that than in the many easy conquests. Ned Jewel, in *The Pioneer* office across the hall, was peculiarly unresponsive. It was, therefore, to Nell's mind, especially desirable that he should become responsive, doubly desirable, because he was personally of better appearance and seemingly of better quality than the others. He had been employed on *The Pioneer* for a year or more as compositor before Nell came to *Chips*. Now he was Mr. Brinton's foreman, a quiet, steady, handsome fellow of about twenty-eight, with brown curls clustering around his forehead, a clear ruddy complexion, and a firm chin. His eyes seemed made to laugh, but an unnatural severity or sadness held them in control, except on occasions when he was taken unawares, and his face brightened for a brief moment. There was just that suggestion of reserve and mystery in his expression which appeals to the imagination and the interest of a young woman. He and Nell had met frequently in the hall between the two offices, and sometimes on the street, but in all this time no acquaintance had sprung up between them. Nell certainly had shown a receptive, even an expectant, attitude whenever they met, and she had contrived that the meetings should occur often enough to give him every opportunity; but thus far nothing more than the ordinary civilities due from a stranger had resulted. She was annoyed, yet, while carefully concealing her purpose from all others, she became more determined than ever to conquer Ned's indifference. She knew he had the reputation of being a woman hater, or at least of distrusting and avoiding women, and she felt that it would be a conquest to be proud of if she could add him to her list of admirers. When Bartley told her to get anyone except Ned Jewel to help on *Chips*, she

made up her mind at once that he should be the very one to take the job, and no other. Bartley's dislike of Ned she could not understand, and therefore regarded it as unimportant. He hated Brinton's whole crew on general principles, because he hated Brinton and his paper. It was possible, even, that he suspected Nell's interest in Ned, but there seemed to be something more in his particular enmity toward the man. For a long time after Jewel had come to Midland, Bartley had avoided him, or watched him suspiciously. More recently, finding that Ned kept out of his way with the same attitude of dislike that so many others showed, Bartley had become more aggressive and took advantage of every opportunity to annoy him. To Nell, who had noticed this only casually, it was a matter of very little significance whether there was one more or one less in the long list of those between whom and Bartley there was mutual dislike. She was bent upon asking Ned Jewel to lend a hand in the present emergency, and her chief's personal feelings in the matter were of not the slightest consequence.

Within a few minutes after Bartley went out, Nell called the "devil" and gave him a note in a sealed envelope to take to Mr. Jewel in *The Pioneer* office.

"Sure, Miss Nell, I dassent go in there; they'll run me out."

"Nonsense, Denny, they won't do——"

"Yes'm, they will; I know that crew; they ain't got no use for none of us; but I kin lick their devil, an' I done it, too."

"Well, just take the note to the door and say it's for the foreman."

Denny took the note and walked slowly and doubtfully out of the office. In three minutes, he came back on a run.

"He chased me with a mallet, an' I didn't

have nothin',” he exclaimed as excuse for running away.

“Who chased you? Mr. Jewel?” asked Nell in surprise.

“Naw—the devil,” replied Denny.

“What did Mr. Jewel say?”

“He read the billet ducks, an' looked flabbergasted; then he said what the devil you wanted of him, an' he was too busy, an' you'd hev ter 'scuse him; then he scratched his head, an' looked like he'd got a spunful 'o caster oil ter take, an' sposed he'd hev ter come an' see what was up. Humph! 'sposed he'd *hev* ter!' I'd like ter spoil his face fer him!”

Nell smiled and began to figure on her triumph. Presently Ned Jewel appeared at the door, where he stood looking in questioningly.

“What's this 'matter of great importance' you wish to tell me?” he asked as she hastened to meet him.

“Why, it's something of great importance to us—that is, to me,” she corrected hastily. “It may be I'm presuming too much, Mr. Jewel, in calling on you, but I've understood you are always ready to do what you can to help a friend in need.”

“Who is this friend in need, and how——?”

“Oh, I know there isn't much friendship between your office and this one,” interrupted Nell, “but I assure you, Mr. Jewel, that I don't share any of that feeling, and I'd a good deal rather you'd count me as a friend.”

“Thanks; but what's the trouble? Who needs help?”

“Why, it's this way; we're short handed on *Chips* this week, and behind on composition, and we've got to get the paper out before noon tomorrow, or Bart will make a terrible row; and I simply can't stand it; and we're all going to work late tonight; and Bart left it to me to get another hand for night work—anybody I pleased—

and the only one I felt like asking was you. Couldn't you come in and help us for a few hours tonight?"

"Well, hardly! I'm sorry, Miss Tompkins," as he saw her look of disappointment, "but I couldn't set type for *Chips*, even if I could stretch a point enough to work for Bartley." The young man hated to refuse help, when appealed to by a pretty girl; but such a request as this not only took him by surprise, but roused a feeling of repulsion.

"You wouldn't be doing it for Bartley, you'd be doing it for me," urged Nell, feeling that her cause was lost, but unwilling to acknowledge defeat. "I've got to get somebody to help us out, or stand another of Bart's tantrums, and they're no fun, I can tell you. I was sure you wouldn't refuse to give us a few hours help—as a personal favor to me."

"It's out of the question, Miss Tompkins; I'd like to oblige you, especially since you make it a personal matter; but the fact is, I simply can't do it. If it was a half-way decent paper, I might swallow my personal feelings and give you a hand; but such a filthy, scurrilous sheet—I don't see how you——"

"That'll do, Mr. Jewel; you can stop right there. It may be you can pick and choose where and how you will earn your living; and it may be others can't. You're welcome to your own opinion about *Chips*, and if you're too good to set type for it, I'm sure nobody wants you to, but don't you dare say one word about *me*. I'll take care of my own morals. I earn an honest living for myself and mother the only way I can, and I won't have my work thrown in my face—Go back to your frame, Jake; this is my funeral; I don't need any of your help."

Young Joe Chabington and Jake Crawford had been attracted by Nell's indignant voice, and Jake was coming toward them threateningly, expecting to have the

pleasant job of throwing the obnoxious *Pioneer* man out of the office. At Nell's peremptory command he retired sheepishly to his frame.

Ned was utterly at a loss how to reply to the angry young woman who stood before him now as anything but a suppliant, her eyes snapping, as she emphasized her anger by swinging her apron across first one arm and then the other.

"I'm sorry I hurt your feelings, Miss Tompkins. Perhaps I ought not to have explained, but you wasn't satisfied without my reasons. Now if you'll excuse me, I'll go back to my work—allow me."

A letter had slipped from the pocket of Nell's apron as she threw it across her arm. She stooped hurriedly to recover it, but Ned was quicker, and politely picked up the letter. As he was about to hand it to her, he noticed the inscription and suddenly withdrew his hand with an exclamation of surprise.

"Why, this belongs to Mr. Hawkins! How did it come——?"

"It does not! It's a personal letter to me. How dare you take my private letters!"

She sprang forward and snatched the letter out of his hand and retreated into the room. Ned took a step after her, involuntarily. Thinking he intended to take the letter from her by force, Nell suddenly pulled open the door of the big box stove in which Denny had made a roaring hot wood fire, but before she could throw the letter into the flames, Ned caught her arm.

"Wait!" he exclaimed in surprise, "you're mistaken, Miss Tompkins; just look at it and see for yourself."

Nell freed her arm and darted to the opposite side of the imposing-stone which stood near the stove. As she did so, her arm struck the protruding end of an iron side-stick, swinging it around on the stone with sudden force. A tall glass bottle half full of benzine stood in

the way of the other end, and receiving the full weight of the blow was sent spinning from the stone and against the open stove. Ned sprang to catch it, but was driven back by a quick flash of flame. The room at once was in confusion. Jake Crawford, with an ugly oath, made a leap for Ned; then realizing the immediate danger, turned quickly and grabbed the pail of water from the sink and dashed it upon the flames; but the benzine bottle had broken and the inflammable liquid spread quickly, carrying the fire with it. The splash of water had little effect. Nell, after one startled cry, joined young Chabington and the foreman in a frantic effort to stamp and beat out the spreading flames. Ned worked as eagerly as the rest. Denny, the "devil," gave one look and rushed to the hall and down the stairs yelling "Fire! Fire! Fire!" at the top of his shrill voice.

The group of old wooden buildings, in one of which *Chips* had its office, stood close to the north bank of the Tittabawassee River. Only the tracks of the F. & P. M. R. R. intervened. A fire starting anywhere in these buildings, if it gained much headway, would almost surely sweep the whole block out of existence. An excited crowd was quickly gathered by the boy's cries.

"It's Bartley's *Chips!* Good job; let her burn!—No! *The Pioneer* is on the same floor!—Thunder! You're right; we got ter fight it!" were some of the exclamations which passed from mouth to mouth. Pails, pans, wash boilers, anything that could hold water, made their appearance as though rained from heaven, and in a few moments a bucket gang was formed from the river's edge to the building and up the stairs. Other fire fighters crowded into the office where Bartley's crew and Ned Jewel were being driven back by the dense smoke and spreading flames. The crew of *The Pioneer*, also, had hurried to the scene at the first alarm, bent on saving their own office. A flood of water soon began

"'Wait! . . . you're mistaken, Miss Tomkins; just look at it and see for yourself.'"

coming up the chain from the river, and with many hands waiting to seize the buckets and dash the water where it would do the most good—and damage—within half an hour from the time it started, the fire was drowned out and every nook and corner of *Chips* office was thoroughly drenched.

The crowd still hung around the place when Bartley, who had just learned of the fire, came upon the scene. For a moment, as he saw the wreck of his office, he became inarticulate with fury; then the flood gates of profanity were opened. He had cause enough for his rage. Evidences were not wanting that there had been some among the fire fighters who had helped on the work of destruction with the wish to make it as complete as possible. Three of the five frames had been burned and had collapsed with their load of type. The other two, untouched by the fire, had been overturned during the confusion, and the contents of the type cases scattered over the floor. Wherever galleys or forms had stood with matter set ready for the paper, nothing but heaps of pi remained. Apparently everything that could be quickly destroyed or hopelessly damaged by fire, water, or rough handling had received the full brunt of the disaster.

Jake Crawford, burned and smoke begrimed, was only less frenzied than his chief. He had another cause for wrath. Nell had snubbed him when he first went to her assistance; but for that the fire would not have occurred.

"It was that meddling fool, Ned Jewel, Bart; he set the fire. He came here and got fresh with Nell, and knocked the benzine on the stove. He and the rest of Brinton's crew smashed the office while we was tryin' to put out the fire."

"That's a lie, Jake Crawford!" broke in Nell, before Bartley could say a word. "I sent for Mr. Jewel to

ask him to help on night work. The fire was an accident and nothing else. I upset the benzine myself, and you had no business to leave it standing on the stone so near the stove, and you know it. If the fire is anybody's fault, it's yours. Ned Jewel had no more hand in smashing things than you had. He worked hard to save the office even though he hates *Chips* and everybody who works on it. He's no sneak, whatever he is."

Jake was puzzled. This was the same girl who had declared herself his friend scarcely an hour ago.

"Seems to me you're mighty anxious to take that Jewel chap's part. What is he——?"

"Hold your jaw there, Jake," commanded Bartley with a sudden change of manner. "Get out of here, everybody, clear out!" he yelled to the crowd of hangers on, and drove them out into the hall. Then he shut the door and turned upon Nell.

"Do you mean to tell me you sent for that skunk, Jewel, after my telling you to get anybody *except* him?"

"I told you I should ask anybody I pleased and take anybody I could get," retorted Nell.

"And now look at the result of your work," snarled Bartley.

"I can see all there is to see without spectacles; but what's the use of crying over spilled milk? You'll get your insurance money and can replace everything."

"Insurance!" sneered Bartley, bitterly; "what good will that do for this week's paper? How am I going to print that story of the Post Office robbery, that's got to be on the street tomorrow noon in order to be ahead of *The Pioneer?*"

"I'm sure I don't know what you will do," said Nell. "I guess you'll have to ask your friend Mr. Brinton for the loan of his office today and tonight. He ought not to refuse when you're burned out."

"Ask old Brinton to let me get out *Chips* in his office?"

The idea seemed to paralyze Bartley. "Why, sooner than do such a thing I'd throw up the whole business and go drown myself in the Tittabawassee."

"But you forget—that story has *got* to be on the street tomorrow noon," repeated Nell, mockingly.

Bartley replied with an oath—the only way he could express correctly his state of mind.

CHAPTER III

The alternative presented by Nell was exasperating to Bartley. He really believed, when the idea was first suggested, that it was impossible beyond all question. Go to Brinton begging a favor! All the past history of the two papers, all the personal relations between the two editors made such a thing utterly preposterous. Yet every moment as he fought with his dilemma, this very thing assumed more and more the form of the inevitable. He strode around his wrecked printing room like a caged tiger, cursing aloud first at one and then another of his crew, or heaping anathemas upon *The Pioneer* crew whom he persisted in believing guilty of willful destruction of his property. Jake Crawford, young Chabington, Denny, and even Nell tried to avoid him, and made an effort to gather together some salvage, but Bartley stopped them.

"Don't you know better than that?" he demanded. "That stuff is no good now. Let it lie there until the insurance is settled."

He unlocked the door of his private office. The fire had not burned its way through the partition, and everything within was as he had left it. The sight gave him a slight sense of relief, and he shut himself in and sat down to decide upon his course. Not only was his printing shop wrecked and all his type scattered, but every line of copy prepared for the morrow's paper was gone.

It would be necessary to rewrite his account of the robbery, as well as all the locals and editorials which had been set but not proved up. One galley proof of

new matter lay on his desk, and two or three proofs of laid-over matter from the previous week. Among them was a highly flavored story of certain happenings which promised to lead to a sensational divorce case in the near future. These proofs, with such clippings as he could quickly cull from the mass piled in a tangled heap on his desk would answer very well for rush copy. He could rewrite the other articles during the day. Everything depended upon the question of getting the assistance of Brinton's crew and facilities, including the loan of enough paper to run off his edition. Here Bartley stuck. There was more than his hatred of Brinton in the way. He was smart enough to realize that he and Brinton, as well as their respective papers, were on opposite sides of the line dividing that which was respectable from that which was not. He knew there could be no agreement between them, and that Brinton's feeling toward him was as strongly antagonistic, though for a different reason, as was his toward Brinton. He was perfectly aware of the fact that the editor of *The Pioneer* would be very glad to see *Chips* discontinue publication permanently, and would seize any opportunity that might present itself for effecting such a result, legally. Therefore Bartley had serious doubts whether, in the event of his asking Brinton for help, the latter would consent to give it. When he reached this point in his review of the question, the whole matter suddenly assumed a very different aspect. He straightened up in his chair and brought his fist down with a bang upon his desk.

"By ——, he's got to do it!" he whispered through his clenched jaws.

The thought of asking a favor from Brinton was too unpleasant to harbor for an instant; but the thought of demanding from him a disagreeable concession was decidedly appetizing. What devilish fun it would be to

use the puritanical old moss-back's type, and presses, and paper, and even his crew, to issue a number of *Chips* that would startle the town! Oh, yes, he would make that number a warm one! It should melt the very rollers on Brinton's Washington press and scorch the paper on which it would be printed; and he would add a line under the title announcing that the paper was issued from "The Pioneer Press" with the assistance of Jesse Brinton and the staff of *The Pioneer*. It would be the best joke ever known in Midland. But—alas, the "but" suddenly dispelled the picture—what if, after all, Brinton should refuse to accede to the demand as firmly as he might refuse to grant the favor?

"I'll have him and his whole crew arrested for willful destruction of a rival's property under cover of a fire, if he gets balky; that will bring him to terms," decided Bartley.

Braced by this thought, he stepped briskly into the outer room and said to his waiting compositors, "Get ready for rush work, I'm going to make arrangements for printing the paper tomorrow." The next moment he was in the hall in front of a door through which he had never yet passed. Just an instant his hand hesitated on the knob, then throwing back his shoulders with a muttered imprecation, he pushed into his enemy's stronghold. He met the stares of curiosity with a pompous air of urgent business and inquired for "Brinton."

"We call him *Mr.* Brinton, and he's very busy in his office," declared Manny Matthews, who was distributing type at the nearest case.

"Suppose he is busy; so am I. Tell him I wish to see him at once."

"Go to the devil!" replied Manny, and resumed his distribution.

Bartley scowled, and walked further into the room.

"Is there anyone here with a civil tongue in his head?" he demanded.

"What's the matter?" called Manny after him. "I simply told you to get the boy to take your message in to Mr. Brinton."

"You lie! You told me to go to——" Bartley stopped short, and the men grinned.

"Sure, I did, and here he is, if you want him. Here, Jimmy," he called to the office "devil," who had been stuffing waste paper into the big bag in the corner, "his Satanic Majesty wants you to convey his respects to Mr. Brinton and inform him that his immediate presence is desired."

"Bart want to see Mr. Brinton?" asked the boy, scratching his head.

"That's what I said, isn't it?" replied Manny. "Hurry up, before another bomb goes off."

Jimmy disappeared into the sanctum and returned to say that Mr. Brinton was engaged, but would be out in a few minutes. They were long minutes to Bartley who stood drumming his fingers on the end of the long table. The grins and chuckles which accompanied whispered conversations among the office crew; the unction with which first one and then another in a loud voice told his neighbor to "go to the devil"; the lively discussion between two compositors at opposite ends of the room upon the relative profit in running a newspaper with small circulation, and getting burned out for the insurance money tended to make Bartley more and more impatient to turn the tables on Brinton and his crew.

He succeeded, however, in assuming a bland and confident air when the Editor of *The Pioneer* stepped out of his private office followed by his foreman, Ned Jewel. Jesse Brinton was a muscular, square built man of dignified bearing, nearly a head taller than Bartley. One

would suppose him to be about fifty-five years of age. His face was clean shaven, showing the rugged lines of a strong character softened by kindness and a clean life. His thick grey hair and eyebrows gave him a distinguished appearance quite out of keeping with his quiet and unassuming habits. Smiles were much more at home in his eyes and the corners of his mouth than frowns, but there were occasions when the latter came, black and severe, all the more so, perhaps, because of their rarity. Bartley advanced to meet him with outstretched hand.

"Ah, Brinton; how are you? I see you escaped without a scorch. Allow me to congratulate you."

The Editor of *The Pioneer* stood silent and severe. He did not appear to see the outstretched hand. His whole attitude expressed an unspoken question and a wish for few words.

Bartley covered an instant's hesitation with a cough, and continued in the same tone of good fellowship, "You know, of course, how complete has been the work of destruction in my establishment. No doubt I have your sympathy, for which I thank you. The thing has come at the most unfortunate time for me—almost ready to go to press with tomorrow's paper. Now everything must be done all over again, and in a big rush, too. I congratulate myself upon having a neighbor so close, who will, I am sure, extend all the courtesies and assistance usual between contemporaries in such an emergency."

Brinton remained silent, still waiting for his caller to come to the point.

"Am I not right?" asked Bartley.

Brinton looked him squarely in the eyes and said, slowly: "No courtesies nor assistance can be 'usual' when such a paper as *Chips* is to be the recipient. It is a public blessing to have the paper destroyed by fire;

and it will be a public calamity if it resumes publication."

"Well, by——!" Bartley controlled himself with an effort. He wished to avoid an open row if possible until his point was gained. "We'll leave all moral questions for the present," he said, "and stick to the business in hand. I came in here to make arrangements for setting up and printing this week's *Chips* in your place. I assume that you will consent, as a matter of course. Once more, am I right? Time is mighty valuable."

"You assume too much, sir, 'as a matter of course'," replied Brinton coolly. "Believing, as I do, that your paper is a nuisance in the community, I should be stultifying myself and committing an affront against the public if I helped you to perpetuate such a paper. It is needless for me to add that a clean sheet would have my heartiest cooperation at such a time."

Bartley threw his restraint to the winds, and with it went his assumed courtesy.

"You refuse your help, do you?" he snapped. "Well, by —— we'll see about that. A small fire starts in your competitor's office—is deliberately set by your foreman, I'm told. Your whole crew, ready for the signal, rushes in and wrecks the place and destroys whatever property the fire spares. I'm not saying you put them up to the job, but after what you have just said, it looks mighty like it. Now you gloat over your work, and insult me in the bargain. You seem to think you have everything your own way, but you haven't, not by a —— sight. If you don't allow me the facilities to get out my paper until I can refit my office, I'll have you and your whole crew arrested for willfully destroying a rival's property under cover of a fire."

For a moment Jesse Brinton made no reply. He was struggling with the temptation to throw his pestiferous visitor out of the room, but only his square set jaws and

a dangerous gleam in his eyes bore witness to the inward stress. He made no movement whatever. When he spoke, his tones were still quiet and cold.

"Mr. Bartley, your misfortune has led you into curious errors. One is the belief that your threats could force me into taking any action which I had decided not to take. Another is your professed belief that some or all of my men purposely destroyed property in your office. I heard of that charge when it was first made this morning, and although I did not then believe it, I have been investigating the matter searchingly. My foreman, Mr. Jewel, here, went to your printing room in response to an urgent request. He was there during all the confusion and until you arrived. I have questioned him and each of my men separately and am convinced that there is no truth whatever in your accusation. There are many persons in Midland whom you have made your enemies. Doubtless some of them were at the fire. You must look elsewhere than in this office for those who, as you believe, destroyed your property. If you can prove by reliable witnesses that any of my men committed willful damage in your place, I stand ready to discharge the offender and pay for the damage myself."

"I suppose you'll put that in writing?"

"As to lending you facilities to publish your paper," continued Brinton, ignoring the interruption, "I anticipated from the first that you might make such a request, and I decided exactly what I would do. The publication, with its usual contents, is not fit to print. I certainly shall not allow my type nor press to be used for such a purpose. It might be an edifying spectacle, however, to see a single decent number, even though it were made so unwillingly. It would serve as an object lesson by contrast. I will therefore permit you to set up and print in my room, between now and noon tomorrow, and

will lend you enough paper for the purpose, a one-page issue of *Chips*, my spare type and time being limited, subject to the following conditions: Every line of copy is to be submitted to me before being set up in type, and the final proof of the form is to be likewise submitted to me just before it goes to press; and nothing is to be set up or printed to which I object as immoral, vicious, or slanderous. If you wish to publish the paper under these conditions, you may begin work at once under the direction of my foreman, who will assign two frames for your compositors. Your use of type and press must cease promptly at noon tomorrow."

Bartley stared at his adversary in bewilderment. He could hardly realize at first the humiliating terms offered him. When he did so, his lips curled away from his teeth in an ugly snarl.

"You —— old hypocrite! What do you mean? Do you imagine for a minute that I would pass my copy through your fingers, or come crawling on my belly to ask you what I may put in my own paper? You must be crazy, and imagine yourself the——"

"Mr. Bartley, I think you understood the conditions governing my offer? I am not concerned in saying what you shall put into your paper, but I am reserving the right to say what my type and my press shall *not* be used to print. If it is necessary for you to do any more thinking aloud on the subject, I will ask you to retire to some other place. I shall not tolerate further insolence. Ned, if Mr. Bartley accepts the accommodations I have offered, see to it that the necessary equipment is made ready for his use."

The Editor of *The Pioneer* turned without so much as another glance at his angry neighbor and reentered his private office, shutting the door behind him. Bartley glared at Ned, muttered a curse between his teeth, and strode out of the room. In his own office he sat for some

time in thought. Slowly a cunning look crept into his eyes; his scowl melted away, and the suspicion of a smile lurked at the corners of his mouth. He slapped his knee and exclaimed, "Good!" Then he scribbled a short note and called his boy to take it to Mr. Brinton. "I'll make the old fool wish he hadn't meddled with the buzzsaw," he chuckled.

CHAPTER IV

The editor of *Chips* sat alone in his sanctum working rapidly. He had been grinding out copy for two hours, and seemed to be enjoying the work hugely. Every little while he chuckled to himself as he dispatched a handful of copy by his boy Denny. It could hardly be because of the speedy progress he was making, for less than half of the copy had reached his compositors. Indeed, he chuckled almost as much as when Denny brought back batches of manuscript or clippings with the word "disallowed" written by Brinton in blue pencil on the margin.

Bartley knew how much was necessary to keep his compositors busy, and he managed to get enough for that purpose through the "censor," but for every stickful of such matter, he sent as much, or more, which he knew would come back. The most salacious items and jokes he could find, and the most offensive editorial and personal paragraphs concerning Brinton and his friends which he could write, were sent along for the purpose of "getting even." The story of the Post Office robbery was to be held back until the last moment.

Upon Mr. Brinton the effect of Bartley's bombardment was not quite what the latter had judged. The indecencies stirred only disgust and an added contempt for their author; the personal attacks upon himself were passed over with indifference or slight amusement. When they were aimed at others they provoked some irritation, tempered with a feeling of satisfaction that for once, at least, he was able to forbid their publication. Once only did he exhibit anger. He had just called

Ned Jewel into his office to give him the few sheets of "allowed" copy for Bartley's foreman and the balance which was to be returned to Bartley. He was reading the last page of an article as Ned came in, and he threw it down on his desk and struck it with his fist.

"There's nothing sacred from that jackal!" he exclaimed. "Just look at that!"

Ned picked up the sheets and read:

BRANDS FROM THE BURNING.

Our readers are all familiar with the slick manner in which the late Farmer Hawkins's son Samuel got himself pardoned for moonshining, robbery, attempted murder, and various other crimes, by pretending that he had "got religion," as the niggers say, and by doing what every mother's son who had hands and feet did last fall—that is, fighting the big fire. Certainly young Hawkins was "saved;" no one will deny that; he was saved from a number of years in prison, at least. He has been spoken of ever since by Parson Allen (who did the saving), and by others who speak the language of cant and hypocrisy, as "a brand from the burning." We ourself think this appropriate, but not quite explicit enough. We remember, something over a year ago, tasting a very fair brand of juice made by this same Hawkins, Jr., on a place in the big swamps which he called Mystic Isle, and from which he named his moonshine. We never heard whether any of this beverage was saved from the forest fires; but our young friend may know where some of it can be found. We would prefer, therefore, to call him "the Mystic Brand from the burning." What we started out to say, however, and which is of more immediate interest, is that the lamented Hawkins, Senior, is scarcely cold in his grave when his worthy son, in other words, "the brand from the burning," is said to be contemplating getting rid of his father's homestead and finding some business more suited to his well known talents than farming. Doubtless there are other "Mystic Isles" to conquer (if Parson Allen and the U. S. sleuths will keep out of his way); but, first, we are told, this "brand from the burning" is arranging, very appropriately, to gather up from his farm all the other brands from the burning—the genuine ones, in the form of scorched logs—and run them down the river. Since he has, we are informed, something over half a million feet of these logs, there is a chance that the work, if he looks after it himself, will keep him out of mischief for the winter, and *Chips* could wish nothing better for him and the community than that.

Speaking of brands from the burning, we ourself are having some experience in that line. When our office was partly burned out and partly destroyed by the employees of a vindictive rival, we were compelled to make arrangements with the Editor of *The Pioneer* for issuing, this week, from his office. This rival editor, however, could not bring himself to extend such an ordinary courtesy without doing it in as disagreeable a manner as he could devise. So he insisted upon putting his "brand" on every thing that went into this issue. Rather than disappoint our many readers who watch so eagerly for every number of *Chips*, we consented to J. B's temporary assumption of the editorship. Many of the best things prepared for this number have proved to be not to his liking, so we reserve them for our next issue. We know our readers, and that what J. B. does *not* like, they will be sure to enjoy hugely, therefore we can promise an unusually rich paper next week, by which time we hope to have our own office refitted. For the present we can only offer our readers the J. B. "brand" from the burning of the *Chips* office.

"Do you suppose he expected you to let that stuff go in?" asked Ned.

"Hardly likely. The fellow seems to have been amusing himself all the morning by trying to insult me under the pretense of supplying copy for his paper. This last piece makes me wish I had refused even the limited accommodation allowed him. He is bound to use it to advertise himself and call more attention to the filth in his paper. No doubt he will do just as he says and print all he dares of this stuff next week, when it will be read, by those who relish it, with all the greater avidity because it was forbidden this week. His attack on Hawkins is as wholly unprovoked as it is vicious. Everyone knows by now that Sam's conversion was genuine and complete, and he bids fair to become one of our most useful citizens, with a little encouragement; but the boy is very sensitive to any allusions to his past conduct, and a thing like this is liable to hurt and anger him beyond endurance. I must try to think of some way to prevent Bartley from printing it even after he gets the paper into his own hands again."

"I don't see how you can do that; Bartley is a pretty hard man to control," said Jewel.

"There may be one way, if I'm not mistaken," replied the editor. "By the way, Ned," he added, as the young man turned to go out, "has the Tompkins girl alluded in any way to that letter since the fire?"

"No, sir; not a word. She has kept out of my way. I believe she's afraid I will ask questions."

"Very likely; and if questions will accomplish anything, I wish you would ask a few as tactfully as possible. I happen to know that Sam has been expecting a letter from Detroit for several days, and that fact together with the mysterious robbery of the Post Office last night makes this little affair peculiarly interesting, though I can't quite see how such a letter came into the girl's hands."

"She may be an accomplice of the thieves," suggested Ned.

"Oh, I hardly think so. She doesn't seem like a bad girl, except that she works for Bartley."

"You can't judge women by their looks. They somehow manage to hide their deceitfulness under a mask of pretty innocence, and the prettier and more innocent they look, the less they are to be trusted—at least that's my opinion."

"Oh, pshaw, Ned; that style of talk is unbecoming to a young man of your age. You know very little about women. One of these days you'll have your eyes opened and see things differently—when you find the right girl to help you."

"That time will never come, Mr. Brinton; I'm sure of that much at least."

The editor laughed good naturedly and did not dispute further. "See what you can find out about the letter," he said, "but don't mention it to anyone else, least of all to Sam. Poor boy, he will have more than

enough to try him, if this fellow gets after him. Mr. Allen wants to keep Sam from forming a personal enmity for Bartley, and I think Allen is right. He is trying to help Sam make a man of himself, and nothing will hold him back like hatred of those he must rub against."

Angry voices in the outer room caused Ned to hasten thither. He found Bartley's foreman, Jake Crawford, standing at the proof press swearing at everyone in general and some unknown person in particular.

"What's the row?" asked Ned.

"Look here," growled Jake, "some son-of-a-gun has covered this blamed roller with oil jest as I wanted to prove up this galley. I know 'twas jest done on purpose, 'cause I seen Manny Matthews prove up a galley all right not more'n three minutes ago."

"Pretty small trick," said Ned. "Who did it?" Every member of the crew had come to see the fun, but all denied any knowledge of the trick. Jimmy, the office devil, was very busy in the other end of the room, sweeping. This fact alone was suspicious, as he usually was the first on the spot when anything happened, and never swept unless compelled to.

"Come here, Jimmy," called Ned. "Somebody put oil on the proof roller a few minutes ago. Of course you don't know anything about it; but just take and wash both roller and board clean with benzine, put on fresh ink, and pull a good clean proof of that galley for Mr. Crawford, and if you pi a line of type you'll pay the cost of resetting it out of your wages. This time the joke's on you. If there's a next time, it won't be such a joke."

Jimmy obeyed with a sheepish grin. Ned knew his fondness for just such capers, and had sized him up at first glance. On the whole, things were going as smoothly as could be expected. The two crews did not feel such

intense antagonism toward each other as did their chiefs, and they mingled freely as members of the same craft. Ned, who had feared that there might be friction, was agreeably disappointed, and did all he could to oil the wheels. Apparently the only mischief-maker was Jimmy, who, knowing how Bartley and his paper were regarded by his employer and his foreman, thought his efforts to make trouble for the intruders would be winked at. Moreover, he had declared war personally against Bartley's new boy Denny, whose one week of experience as "printer's devil" had been a troublesome one. Jimmy boasted six months in *The Pioneer* office and felt like a veteran, quite competent to teach the newcomer across the hall the mysteries of the trade. He soon learned, however, much to his surprise, that Ned would not tolerate any interference with the work of Bartley's crew, now that Mr. Brinton had given them the privilege of the office. After his experience with the proof roller Jimmy was careful to avoid the foreman's displeasure.

Nell Tompkins was working industriously at a case of nonpareil. Usually vivacious and talkative, she was noticeably quiet this morning. If Ned Jewel chanced to walk toward her, however, she seemed suddenly to have something to say in haste to one of the other compositors. Ned watched her for some time, discreetly. He had no liking for the task Brinton had set him. He almost never voluntarily began a conversation with a woman, even on commonplace subjects, and by this aloofness he had earned the reputation of being a woman hater. With men he was frank, cordial, and friendly, when approached in the same manner. He responded quickly to any direct appeal to take part in the work or sport which interested others, and when he had once joined them he seemed to throw his whole heart into the affair; but left to himself, he was silent, preoccupied,

and melancholy. During the two years he had been employed on *The Pioneer* he had, without realizing it, endeared himself to his employer by his quiet, intelligent work, his steady, unassuming behavior, and his generous impulses toward any who needed help. Mr. Brinton had come to treat him almost as a son, yet he knew little or nothing of his life before coming to Midland, and Ned never spoke of it, nor referred in any way to his relatives, except to say that his father and mother were both dead. Trouble of some kind, it was evident, had caused the lines in his forehead, and the stern set to his jaws. The frequent fits of abstraction, with the faraway look in his eyes, indicated that he still brooded over his trouble, whatever it might be.

With Sam Hawkins Ned sustained a friendly acquaintance, because he had met him with the backwoods preacher, Robert Allen, at Mr. Brinton's home; but no intimacy had grown between the two young men. Sam and his wife lived on his father's farm near Red-Keg, several miles up the river from Midland, and although he had asked Ned to visit him, the latter had never found occasion to accept the invitation. Ned knew, however, that Mr. Brinton was deeply interested in Sam for the sake of his father, who had been Brinton's warm friend. He knew, also, that there was nothing in common between Sam and Bartley, and that any acquaintance with Nell Tompkins was extremely improbable. It had startled him, therefore, to see a letter addressed to Sam in Nell's possession, and her behavior had increased his suspicions to such an extent that he had felt impelled to report the incident to Mr. Brinton. Yet, as he watched Nell at work, he began, in spite of himself, to agree with Brinton that it was hard to believe her guilty of a part in the sensational Post Office robbery of the night before. The sun shining through the window at the end of her frame lit up her hair and face with a soft bril-

liance that enhanced her beauty and revealed every turn of her head and every expression of her face. Her nimble fingers flew over the case and sent the type clicking merrily into her composing stick. Suddenly she glanced toward Ned's desk and caught him looking at her. She turned away quickly, and a blush crept into her cheek. Ned, also, turned around sharply to his desk realizing with a painful sense of irritation that he had been actually admiring the girl. What if the same thought had occurred to her? Nothing could be more unfortunate, because nothing could be further from his intention than to begin any flirtation with her. How had she come by that letter? What had she done with it? Was Bartley in any way connected with the matter? What did it all mean? To furnish answers to these questions was the only way in which Nell had any interest for Ned Jewel.

With Nell the situation was more complicated. She had been nervously expecting that he would ask questions concerning the letter, yet she wished he would speak to her, even to ask them. The repulse she had received earlier in the morning had angered her for the moment, but had not turned her from her purpose. If anything, it had made her more determined. Jake Crawford and the others knew now that she had asked a favor of Ned and had been snubbed. They should see the snubber brought to book; it would be a satisfaction, now, greater than ever to break down Ned's indifference. What if his suspicions had been aroused by the awkward incident of the letter? She would undertake to set them at rest. Aside from her desire to conquer his opposition, it would be much more agreeable to have the good opinion of such a man as Ned. She had admirers without number, but what did they amount to? Not one of them was worth any serious thought. Ned was so different from the others; he was good looking, and self-contained, and

didn't swear, nor use bad grammar, nor drink. In fact, he seemed a gentleman. The others were cheap and disagreeable in comparison. Ned paid no attention to women, so far as she could learn; he seemed not to care for them; but couldn't he be made to care? Surely the look she had just caught was one of admiration, or she was no judge of a man's glances. It was not a look of suspicion, nor dislike—that, at least, was certain. It would be worth while to win the regard, perhaps the love, of such a man as Ned. Who could tell what might ——? She started, blushing furiously, as Ned's voice at her elbow interrupted her thoughts.

"I've been waiting a chance to speak to you, Miss Tompkins, since the fire. I hope you were not hurt?"

"Oh, no, Mr. Jewel, only scared, and—and mad."

"Mad? Because the office was burned?"

"No; partly at you, and partly at Bartley for scolding me about you."

"About me! What in the world could Bartley scold you about me for?" said Ned, and in spite of his intention to conciliate Nell, some vexation was mixed with the surprise in his tone.

"He scolded me because I asked you to help on night work, after he had told me to get anyone except you."

"Oh; I feel honored at his compliment, though I do not understand the reason for it," and Jewel laughed to cover up the sarcasm which he could not suppress.

"I don't know, I'm sure," said Nell. "Bartley seems to hate you; but why he does I can't imagine. The rest of us don't feel that way. I'm sure it would be a good deal nicer to be friends," she concluded wistfully.

"Thank you; you're very kind," said Ned; "but frankness is one of the necessary steps in that direction. I want to ask you again about that letter to Mr. Hawkins you had in your pocket this morning," he went on in a lower tone to prevent the others from hearing. "If

you found it, or if it came to you by mistake, you will surely want to send it to its rightful owner. It may be a matter of importance to him."

"Oh, really, Mr. Jewel, you are mistaken," exclaimed Nell, earnestly, at the same time glancing nervously at her nearest neighbor to see if he was listening. "The letter was addressed to me—Nell Tompkins—it was a personal letter—really. The name does look a little like Hawkins, the way it was written—they both end in 'kins,' you know. You didn't see straight, that was all; something must have suggested the name Hawkins to your mind just at that minute, and you thought you saw it. You only had the least glance, anyhow." Nell was growing more confident as her argument proceeded.

"My eyes seldom deceive me like that," remarked Ned, drily. "Why were you in such haste to destroy the letter when a second look would have convinced me of my error, if I had been mistaken?"

"Why—you see—I—I was afraid you might see who the letter was from, and I—I didn't want you to know." Nell blushed again in pretty embarrassment as though to prove her words.

"H'm! that would make no difference to me, or to you, either. I am not in the least concerned in knowing from whom you receive letters; but where is the letter now? A slight glance at it would settle the question once for all, and I should be very glad to acknowledge my mistake if guilty of one. I was so very certain, and your action was so—peculiar, that I think you owe it to yourself to set all doubt at rest if you can."

"I—can't. The letter got burned up in the fire," said Nell, with a little tremor of hesitation; then, seeing the look on Ned's face, she added pleadingly, "Oh, Mr. Jewel, you don't believe me; I know you don't."

"It is all very unfortunate, and very unpleasant, Miss Tompkins, in view of the fact that Mr. Hawkins has

been expecting an important letter for several days, and considering—what happened at the Post Office last night."

"Oh! you don't think——"

But Ned had turned away and was too far to recall without attracting the attention of the rest of the crew, who had just quit work as the whistle in a nearby mill blew for the noon hour.

Denny had been out on an errand, and Jimmy was waiting at the foot of the stairs for him when he returned.

"Hi, there! you're going to catch it from Bart if you don't hurry. He's been lookin' for you the past half hour. He told me to tell you, the minute I saw you, to run down to Hale's gun shop on Townsend Street and bring back a pound of italic spaces, quick; he's got to have 'em right away. Have 'em charged."

Denny looked at his enemy doubtfully a moment, as though inclined to balk; but the urgency of the message and his dread of Bartley's anger caused him to decide against delay, and he started off on a run. In twenty minutes Denny returned out of breath and sought Bartley.

"I couldn't get 'em," he panted. "Mr. Hale said they didn't keep 'em, an' he didn't know nothin' about 'em."

"Couldn't get what?" roared Bartley. "What are you talking about?"

"Italic spaces. Jimmy said you wanted a pound of 'em right away."

"Italic spaces! what in ——? Why, you little idiot, don't you know there's no such thing? You're a fine printer," and Bartley laughed at the crestfallen lad. "See here," he called, as Denny, muttering angrily, was turning away. "You'd like to get even with Brinton's devil, I'll bet a dollar."

"Oh, yes, sir! you bet I would!" exclaimed Denny, his face lighting up eagerly.

"Well, I'll tell you how to do it. It's dollars to doughnuts the boy never saw type lice. You ask him when you get a chance, and if he says 'no,' you get Joe to show 'em to him. Tell Joe on the q. t. that I said so."

"What are they?" inquired Denny, not quite sure whether his employer was in earnest or not.

"Never mind; you do as I tell you. When Jimmy sees them, you'll know; and you'll be even with him for the italic spaces," laughed Bartley.

Denny lost no time in telling young Joe Chabington what Bartley had said, and Joe, grinning, promised to have the type lice ready for Jimmy's inspection whenever called for. Denny thought best not to be too precipitate for fear of exciting suspicion. He met Jimmy after lunch with a cross look and replied to the latter's question about italic spaces with a brief "They ain't no such thing; all spaces is alike." Toward the middle of the afternoon he approached Jimmy and said in a tone of disgust:

"This is an awful dirty shop; why don't you keep it clean?"

"It's cleaner'n yours ever is."

"We don't have bugs over everything."

"No more do we."

"Yes, you do; your type's all full o' lice."

"You're a liar; it ain't got none, or I'd of seen 'em."

Denny felt a thrill of exultation at his enemy's admission of ignorance.

"They're there all right, Joe Chabington said so. If you don't believe it, just go over to the stone where he's makin' up that form, an' he'll show 'em to you?"

Still doubting, Jimmy went to see for himself. The form for the single page of *Chips* lay on the big stone near the stove. As fast as the reading matter was set up and corrected the type was placed in its proper column in this form to save time, and the unfilled spaces

were blocked out with wooden "furniture." Joe was just dumping a galley of corrected matter into the form.

"Sure, there's plenty of the pesky things," he said, in response to Jimmy's question. "Didn't you never see type lice? Don't see how you could help it. This type is full of 'em, all down between the lines. Look sharp an' I'll bring 'em out." He drew apart the type in one of the columns, leaving a space of about two inches between the sections, at the same time squeezing the dirty sponge into the space, which was quickly filled with the water.

"It takes water to make 'em come out; can't get at 'em any other way," he explained. "Now look close an' you'll see 'em."

As Jimmy, now thoroughly interested leaned close over the type, mouth open and eyes straining to see the lice in the water, Joe suddenly closed up the sections of type with a snap, and Jimmy saw them! His eyes, mouth, and nose were full of them, and they were dripping from his face and running down his neck. Sputtering and scolding, he hurried off to the sink, while Denny yelled with delight, and several of the compositors of both papers, who had received the wink from Joe, joined in the laugh.

"Ge!" cried Denny, following his discomfited foe, "I can't buy italic spaces, but I can sell type lice—sell 'em by the million!"

CHAPTER V

"A QUEER yarn," said Mr. Brinton, fingering somewhat uncertainly several sheets of manuscript which he had just been reading with close attention. After a moment's hesitation he handed the copy to his foreman. "Here, we may as well let him print it, but I am tempted to make a little investigation, myself. Let me have a copy of *Chips* as soon as it goes to press."

The story of the Post Office robbery had reached Brinton's office about six o'clock in the evening. With it had come another special article making a glowing appeal to the public for contributions to a "relief fund" for the family of a logger who had been injured in the woods. Bartley announced that "although stricken down by the sudden disaster of fire," etc., *Chips* would set an example in generosity by starting the fund with fifty dollars. Mr. Brinton had returned the appeal to Bartley with "disallowed" written on the margin.

"I can't have one of his pilfering charity collections started from my office," he told Ned. "He has made no accounting of the last three, and I am reliably informed that none of the beneficiaries received anywhere near the amount shown by the subscriptions announced in the paper. Bartley always meets complaints by explaining that many of the donations pledged were not paid, or that the expenses had to be deducted; but I have never heard any contributor admit that he had not paid his pledge; and I have never seen any statement of 'expenses.' They may include the editor's salary and commission, the office rent, and general supplies, for all the public knows."

Bartley was enraged by the refusal to allow his appeal. He had hoped to claim for it Brinton's indorsement on the strength of his permission to print it in this issue. Protests were unavailing; the appeal could not go in. Pinned down to the question as to which of the three objections was urged against it, Brinton decided that immorality would apply. Before long, another batch of copy came to take its place. It was a passionate outburst which bore as a caption "What is Morality?" Brinton read through the high-sounding sentences, the sanctimonious sentiments, and the withering sarcasm with an amused smile. It was carefully impersonal in form, but deliberately personal in innuendo. "There is plenty of truth here—on the surface," he remarked as he handed the article to Ned, "but none at all in what the writer would have me read between the lines. Well, it can't do much harm, let it go in."

Early the next morning Mr. Brinton was at his office waiting to pass on the final page proof of *Chips*, as agreed, before the paper should go to press. He wished to be sure that nothing had been smuggled in which he had not sanctioned. When Ned handed him the sheet and told him that Bartley had given orders to send it to press at once Brinton glanced up and down the columns with a close scrutiny.

"This last article hasn't been corrected," he said, pointing to the little sermon on morality. "It is full of wrong fonts and inverted type. The compositor must have been asleep or drunk when he set it up."

"Yes, I showed it to Crawford, but he said Bartley ordered him not to delay the paper to correct it, that he didn't care whether anyone read the article or not, and he must go to press at once. I didn't see that it was my place to insist on typographical accuracy, so I let the matter drop."

"H'm; he wrote that for my especial benefit, I sup-

pose. Well, if he wants to print his paper full of pi, let him do it. I can't call it vicious, or immoral, or slanderous. Let him go ahead; and you be sure to give me one of the first printed copies."

Patrick Hogan, "the faithful and usually efficient" night watchman insisted on continuing upon duty without interruption, notwithstanding the robbery and his rough handling by the thieves. He would not permit any suggestion that he was in any way incapacitated, or that there had been any lack of vigilance on his part which had given the outlaws their chance. The authorities were not disposed to hold him blameworthy, so Pat was permitted to stick to his post. He had finished his breakfast Thursday morning, and was about to go to bed for the day, when Jesse Brinton knocked at the door of his little cottage in Paddy Hollow. Pat bowed and scraped elaborately at sight of his distinguished guest.

He knew Mr. Brinton very well by sight and regarded him as a great man, but he had never spoken with him. To have so prominent a gentleman call upon him at his home was an honor indeed. He dusted a chair with his handkerchief and begged his visitor to be seated.

"It's the illegant avenin', Misther Brinton."

"Yes, Pat, it's a fine morning."

"Wall, wall, Misther Brinton, mornin' or avenin', it's all the same. Some folks do be gettin' up, an' others, like meself, do be goin' to bed. An' is there somethin' I can do for you, Misther Brinton?"

"Why, perhaps so, Pat; we'll see. Are you feeling all right again after the knocking about those fellows gave you night before last?"

"Sure, 'twas nothin' at all, Misther Brinton. Me head did shwim around a bit whin the blast from the goon powder went bowlin' me over like a nine pin in sthrike;

but I may be thankful I kept me head on me body at all, an' much obliged to ye, Misther Brinton."

"Do you mind telling me all about the affair, Pat? I suppose you are tired out with answering questions by this time, aren't you?"

"Not at all, Misther Brinton, not at all; I'll be plased to tell ye all I can, an' more, too, if you like." Pat went over again the same story he had told so many times during the previous day, merely adding such natural embellishments as his Irish imagination and constant repetition made unavoidable.

"I suppose you got a pretty good idea of what the rascals looked like?" asked Brinton.

"The best I could, sir, considerin' the darkness an' the masks wore by all three. I couldn't exactly tell how they were complected, sir."

"Well, did you notice particularly that one of them had only three fingers on one hand?"

"Divil a bit of that, Misther Brinton."

"Or that one man limped badly?"

"Sure, that same must of been meself, then, for I was that shtiff when I got out of me chair I couldn't walk without a limp for some time."

"Well, was one of the three much taller than the others?" persisted Mr. Brinton.

"That's right, sir; at the laste its half right. There was two of thim which was much taller than the other, an' they tended to the safe while the shmall one wint through the letters, an' 'twas him tied me legs and arms so tight, divil take him."

"I'm afraid you have been misrepresented, Pat, if what you say is true. Bartley's *Chips* quotes you as saying that one of the men had only three fingers, that another limped when he walked, and that the third was much taller than the others. Evidently that part of the yarn is made up."

"You don't tell me, Misther Brinton! Would ye mind lettin' me see what it says there?"

Brinton handed Pat the copy of *Chips* which he had just brought from the office, and Pat read with pride and excitement the first printed account of his experience with the outlaws. His reading was punctuated with frequent exclamations, and when he came to the sentences proclaiming him faithful and efficient, and, at the end, declaring him wholly blameless, Pat's face beamed with pleasure.

"Sure, its the fine man, Misther Bartley is, intirely! An' so that's the illegant newspaper report he got from me, is it. It rades like thim dime novel papers. He give me tin dollars for that same an' tould me I was the grand newspaper man, an' he might want me to report for the paper some day. Wall, wall! an' me doin' nothin' but night watchin', an' me name's in the paper."

"So you never said any such thing about one man having only three fingers, and one limping, and one being tall?" asked Mr. Brinton.

"Well, now, Misther Brinton, it's here in print; I must av said it. If Misther Bartley says so, I can't go back on it, an' it bein' me own shtory that same mornin', an' paid for an' printed."

"But you just declared those things were not true," exclaimed the editor.

"Did I? Wall thin me mimory must be failin'. To tell the truth, me head has been a bit lightheaded since the knock on the floor it got whin me chair wint over. But, if Misther Bartley's got it down in me shtory it must be true, an' I'll swear to it to me dyin' day."

Brinton saw there was nothing to be gained by further questioning, so he bade Pat Hogan good morning and walked away in a very dissatisfied frame of mind. Why had he been so careless as to show the man the story in *Chips?* Evidently, Bartley, by flattery and money, had

made him agree to anything that might be put into his mouth. Now that he had seen it in the paper, coupled with praise of himself, he would, as he had just said, swear to the truth of it against everything. It would have been much better to get his signed statement and have it sworn and delivered to the authorities, before the yarn in *Chips* appeared; but Pat's positiveness had misled Brinton into believing that he would repudiate the statements attributed to him by Bartley. It irritated Brinton to think that he had not shown as much cleverness in the cause of truth as he believed Bartley had shown in the cause of falsehood. As he walked back to his office, his vexation increased. While his suspicions were strengthened, he had by his own lack of diplomacy lessened the chances of proving anything. More than that, he had spoiled the most important witness for the people. The thought that he had actually played into Bartley's hands, if his suspicions were correct, was humiliating. Whether or not Bartley was one of the thieves, or in league with them, the interview with Pat Hogan would result in causing the latter now to confirm rather than dispute that story in *Chips*. The incident of the letter to Sam Hawkins which Ned had seen in Nell's possession had also terminated most unsatisfactorily. It was barely possible, though not probable, that Ned had been mistaken in the name, as Nell insisted. In any event, it would be impossible to prove the contrary, now that the letter itself was missing. There seemed to be, on the whole, not enough tangible evidence, so far, on which to base an accusation.

Before returning to his office, Brinton stopped at the Post Office for his mail. He spoke pleasantly to several of the group of loungers and gossips who had gathered, even so early in the day, to inquire if anything had been heard of the robbers, or if any clue had been found to their identity. Percy Ravenstock, "the giant

dwarf," as he was sometimes called because of his small, deformed body and long, muscular arms, was sitting on a box near the group taking no part in the conversation, but listening intently, as usual. The flaming poster, already tacked up by the Post Office authorities offering a large reward for the capture of the outlaws, attracted general comment, but the opinion seemed to be that the three men had made good their escape. The sheriff's searching party as well as the citizens' committee had returned without discovering a single clue. Brinton, as soon as he learned that there had been no definite developments, left the Post Office and continued on his way to his office.

"Reon says he never seen such a blind trail in his life, and what's more, he don't believe the men went into the huckleberry swamp at all," said Peter Hale, the gunsmith.

"Where does he imagine they did go, then?" asked Hank Farineau, a local lawyer, and close friend of Bartley.

"Wall, he didn't say he imagined anything about it," replied Hale. "I reckon if he has any ideas he ain't givin' 'em out for publication; they might get to the crooks themselves and put 'em on their guard."

Farineau scowled and turned to Ben Chabington, keeper of the Midland Hotel and father of the young compositor on Bartley's *Chips*.

"What do you think has become of the fellows, Chab?" he asked.

"Well, I'm waiting; I hain't formed much opinion jest yet. It did look to me as if the huckleberry jungles up the railroad was as likely a place as any for them to hide. Wait till we see what Bart has to say in *Chips*, and Brinton in *The Pioneer*."

"May hev to wait some time fer *Chips*," said Jake Vogel, hitching his way forward somewhat after the

manner of a sailor. "Ye know that *Chips* war burned out yesterday, an' durn good job, too."

"You forget Bart," said Farineau. "He don't lay down so easy. He went straight to Brinton after the fire and made arrangements to print his paper in *The Pioneer* office. They had it pretty hot for a little while, but Bart came out on top."

"Oh, he did, did he?" replied Jake. "Wall, I ain't so sure. Mr. Brinton ain't no spring chicken himself, an' he ain't apt to let Bart have any more than he wants to give him."

"How did Bartley's shop get afire? Does anybody know?" asked Peter Hale.

"Yes; Bart told me himself," said Farineau. "Brinton's foreman, Ned Jewel, came into *Chips* office yesterday morning early while Bart was out and got fresh with Nell Tompkins. Crawford saw him, and so did your boy, Chab. Nell and Jewel had words over something, and he threatened her, and made a jump to strike her, or something, and in trying to defend herself she upset the benzine bottle on the stove, so she says; but Bart declares Jewel did it on purpose to set fire to the shop. Maybe he wanted to kill Nell. Nobody can get a word out of either of them as to what the row—— what the devil are you all staring at?"

Percy, the dwarf, had drawn nearer while Farineau was speaking, and was listening with the most excited attention. His face had become livid, and his eyes gleamed murderously. His breath came and went in quick gasps. The rest of the group had noticed his strange behavior before Farineau stopped speaking and were staring at him in wonder which was rapidly becoming alarm.

"Percy's gone mad!" whispered Chabington.

"He's goin' to run amuck!" said Hale, edging away.

"I will kill him! I will kill him!" muttered the dwarf slowly, as though talking to himself.

"Nonsense! who you goin' ter kill, Percy?" asked Jake Vogel, attempting to laugh.

Percy stared at Jake an instant uncomprehendingly; then he shrugged his shoulders; the wild look faded from his eyes to be replaced by the customary furtive, suspicious look which regarded most men as enemies. He replied with an inarticulate grunt, glanced quickly from one to the other of the group, and made his way off to the street without a word.

"What in the name of mischief has got into the dwarf?" said Farineau. "Who is it he wants to kill?"

"You were all just talking about Ned Jewel. It couldn't be that Percy is sweet on Nell, and wants to kill Ned for bothering her, could it?" suggested Chabington.

"By jove! It may be; Nell is such a witch; if she looks at a man once she can make him think he's in love with her. The poor idiot may be suffering from that delusion. But I pity any fellow he reaches for with those long arms of his," said Farineau, with a laugh.

CHAPTER VI

The crisp morning air of the late October was full of a mysterious tonic that made the blood leap and gave spring to the step. In the grey, uncertain light before sunrise the trees at the edge of the forest stood ghost-like, with frost-laden branches reaching out over field and road, silently beckoning the venturesome explorer into shadowy chambers of enchantment. Hidden voices of the tiny woodspeople repeated the invitation. Squirrels, chipmunks, bluejays, chickadees, and a far-away raccoon took up the call, ready, on an instant, to disappear with a whisk and a flutter should their enticing summons be obeyed. As the sun came up over the distant fringe of woods and sent its first dazzling rays through the tree tops a brilliant scene was revealed. Frost crystals sparkled like Aurora's diadem for a brief moment and then yielded themselves as sacrifice to the divinity who displayed their beauty. Here and there the deciduous trees, arrayed in gorgeous autumn colors stood the more conspicuous by contrast with their gaunt, blackened companions, the pines. The natural glory of the woods had been sadly marred. A year ago the great fire of '71 had swept through them devouring everything in its path. Thousands of acres had been denuded of the luxurious green needles. Many of the oak, and beech, and ash trees had weathered the fearful storm of fire, suffering damage while saving themselves alive; but the pines had everywhere succumbed. The flames fed riotously upon their pitch-laden needles and roots until the great trees were robbed of the last drop of their life blood and stood bare and blackened victims

for the tornado which followed the fire and laid many of them low. Wherever the soil lay shallow above the hard-pan, causing the roots to spread out in a circle close to the surface, the trees were easily overturned, and the roots with their thin layer of earth stood up from ten to thirty feet in the air. On the sandy ridges, where the roots had penetrated deeper, most of the trees were still standing, though here and there some had been snapped off above ground by the mighty wind.

This fearful killing of the pines meant great loss to all owners of timber land. Some were ruined by it. Sam Hawkins, after his father's death, during the winter succeeding the fire, had come into possession of the farm homestead, and a quarter section near Red-Keg, the larger part of it being covered with good timber. He had intended to continue developing the farm in compliance with his father's earnest wish, but one summer's experience had convinced him that it would be impossible to overcome his aversion for farming, and that there would be little chance for his making a success handicapped by such aversion. His father's foreman, Barney O'Boyle, had settled, with his wife, upon a government homestead of 160 acres near the upper waters of the Sturgeon, and although Sam had secured an excellent man and capable farmer, John Carroll, to take his place, he had decided in the fall to clean up all the available timber and then sell the farm to the first man who wanted it. With the proceeds, and what money his father had left him, he would look for some business more to his liking and more promising of results.

The Hawkins quarter section had contained some of the most stately pines to be found in central Michigan; but now they were standing bare and black, or lying in tangled confusion of roots and tops in the devastated forests. It was necessary to cut them into saw-logs and

market them at once before the worms could get at them or they would be almost a total loss. These "brands from the burning," as Bartley had sneeringly called them, meant to Sam Hawkins some half million or more feet of lumber if he could get them to the river during the coming winter. The task was far more than ordinarily difficult, but he had been fortunate in securing the help of some of the best loggers in the country, friends of his father and, more recently, his own friends; for during the past year Sam's relations with the rough but true-hearted and sturdy men of the Red-Keg region had changed vastly for the better. Ros Whitmore, whose youngest child, little Tilly, Sam had rescued from the great fire, took charge of the road-making, finding his own crew. The cutting was let out to John Maloney, his nearest neighbor, and father of Barney O'Boyle's wife, Norine. Maloney had, for the elder Hawkins's sake, and afterward for Sam's sake, forgiven the young man's rascality of the year before. John Carroll, Sam's farmer, with several expert axmen, worked under Maloney's direction. The work of hauling and skidding was to be under his own supervision, with the champion teamster Pete Murray as his foreman to supply with his expert knowledge Sam's lack of experience. Pete's particular rival and best friend, Joel Bailey, had agreed to join him in "making things hum," and several other drivers with their teams had been engaged for the winter's work. The cutting was well advanced before the end of October, and as much of the road-making as could be done before the snow and freezing weather made the task easier.

The sun was scarcely half an hour above the edge of the woods when Sam Hawkins entered the private road cut through from his farm in the northeast quarter of his quarter section to the State road which ran along the western boundary. The ringing staccato of the

axman's chorus sounded pleasantly as he approached, and the pendulum swing of the crosscut saws made harmonious accompaniment in the woodland symphony of work.

Nothing looked the same to Sam Hawkins as it had looked a year ago. His eyes had been opened, and his viewpoint changed. Ambition was stirring in his breast, ambition to be something and to do something. The men he had scorned and regarded as beneath him now seemed far above him in the social scale. He longed to win their good will and respect, and to make them forget what he had been. He was a young man, only twenty-five; there was time yet to amount to something. His face was smooth, his eye keen; he could look men in the face—if not reminded of what had been; his step was firm and elastic, and he had lost the affected, half-insolent, half-complaining tone of voice which had once characterized him.

Not far from the private road the two Johns, Maloney and Carroll, were busy with a saw on a great pine tree which lay stretched out in the midst of a tangle of fallen trees. One end was held ten feet in the air by the mass of upturned roots, the other end was buried in a heap of charred branches. John Carroll rode aloft on the log while John Maloney stood below him on the trunk of another tree. The newly gummed saw slid back and forth between them as it slowly bit its way into the live wood under the scorched bark.

"Good morning, John," called Sam as soon as he caught sight of Carroll perched high upon the blackened bole of the tree.

"Good morning, Mr. Hawkins—Sam," replied both Johns with a laugh, and then for the first time Sam noticed Maloney at the lower end of the saw.

"Oh, good morning, Mr. Maloney; I didn't see you; the shadows seem to cling to the ground and I only saw

the sun on Carroll's head. It's going to be another fine day. Is the cutting coming on all right?"

"Foine an' illegant, an' as well as ye can expect in this beautiful tangle," replied Maloney, referring to the weather and the log cutting. "'Twill be the foine wrastle the swampers will have intirely to snake those logs out to the roads," and he turned his eyes around the scene of confusion and shook his head doubtfully. Indeed it seemed that the science and magic of the most experienced swampers would be taxed to the utmost to cope with the situation. Swamping to advantage at any time is the high art of the logging craft. Just how and where to get hold of an immense log to extricate it from its position—sometimes wedged between trees, sometimes riding on other logs high in the air, sometimes imbedded in mud or swamp and then frozen there—requires both nerve and good judgment, and much valuable time would be wasted by anyone attempting the job without the necessary skill and experience. When added to the usual difficulties was the jungle of tree tops and upturned roots, the work was such as to put the best of swampers on their mettle.

"Yes, indeed, it's a tough job," replied Sam, "but I guess it won't get the best of Old Leatherback. I never saw him work, but everybody says he is a wizard at swamping, and that when he gets his chain and swamp-hook fixed to suit him, the log will follow his oxen as meekly as the little lamb followed Mary, don't you know."

"It's the truth," said Maloney, "an' if the lad will lave the bottle alone long enough, ye couldn't get a better than him to tase the logs out o' this; but ye'll nade others a-plenty if ye're goin' to kape your skids full."

"Oh, yes; there'll be at least six swampers up here as soon as the snow comes and the roads are ready. I'm

going down to Red-Keg this morning to see if the men are there yet."

A sudden crash and a cry of alarm sounded near by. An axman, Ferd Peters, had been standing on a prostrate tree which was held in place by its roots, and had been butting it off with an ax. The top lay across another prostrate tree at right angles in such a way that the greater weight was at that end. When Peters had nearly severed the butt from the roots it suddenly broke itself free and sprang several feet upwards throwing the axman off. He had fallen to the ground and lay motionless as Maloney, Carroll, Sam, and one or two others who had been working near by hurried to his rescue.

"Nothin' much," he grunted, slowly gathering himself together as the men came up. "Might a-known the pesky thing would fly up; didn't think it would, though. Lucky I didn't break nothin'." He examined himself from head to foot to make sure, and then picking up his ax returned to work.

"Can't always tell which way these critters are goin' to jump," remarked Carroll, surveying anew the tree on which he and Maloney were working. "Guess this one will drop all right, in which case I'll hang on to the roots."

The two men resumed their sawing, while Sam stood watching. Presently the saw began to bind from the strain on the fallen tree, and in a few minutes it was wedged fast. Maloney took the incident good humoredly as a thing to be expected, and began patiently to extricate the saw, but Carroll gave voice to his disgust.

"That's the way it goes from mornin' till night," he said. "The blame saw sticks in every butt. Cuttin' up into logs ain't so bad, but this here—it's enough to make a fellow cuss. I'm plagued sorry, for my part,

Sam, that you ain't goin' to work the farm. That's more in my line than loggin'."

"Oh, you can find chance enough for that if you want it, John," laughed Sam; "but what has that got to do with logging in the winter? You can't be raising crops while the ground is frozen and covered with snow drifts."

"No; but you can be takin' care of cows an' pigs, an' horses, an' such, an' helpin' 'em to enjoy life when they can't do anything for themselves. That's the kind of work that just suits me for winter time."

"Well, I declare, John, you're the very man Mr. Brinton is looking for. He'll have cows, and pigs, and horses on his farm next year, and he's going out there to live. I don't believe he has engaged a farmer, but I know he wants one who is fond of animals. You'd better apply for the place."

"I'll do that, you bet!" exclaimed John; "and the sooner the better, and much obliged to you for mentionin' it. When is he likely to want me?"

"Oh, not before Spring. You mustn't leave me now, you know. I'll speak to Mr. Brinton about it the very next time I go down to Midland, and that may be to-morrow."

"Much obliged, Sam; and would you mind, while you're about it—that is, do you suppose he's likely to want a young woman in the house, maybe?"

Sam laughed. "I see you've got your eye out for the rest of the family. Well, it's possible. He might be able to give your sister a place in the house. I'm sure I can't say; but I'll mention that, too, if you like."

"You bet I would!" exclaimed the young farmer, and his eyes shone with delighted anticipation. "You tell Mr. Brinton that Bessie is a fine, strong girl, willin' to work, cooks victuals fit for a king, gentle as a lamb, true as gold, can wash, an' sew, an' do anything else a

woman ought to do, an' as pretty as a picture in the bargain. Reckon he won't want much more. If he does, I'll bet my Bessie can do it if anybody can. I'm mighty anxious to bring her on where I am. 'Taint right to leave her alone so long out there in Pennsylvany."

"If she's such a wonder as you say, Mr. Brinton will be sure to jump at the chance," said Sam.

After a few cheery words with the other men near by, Sam returned to the road, untied his horse, sprang into the saddle and galloped off toward Red-Keg where most of his winter's crew of lumber-jacks were congregated at the tavern and the small boarding houses awaiting the signal to go into camp.

"Who would think 'twas the same boy?" muttered John Maloney, more to himself than to his companion. "He houlds his head up, an' looks his man in the eye; an' he talks like a man, which is something he never did before. Sure, it's the foine lad he'll be makin' some day if he kapes it up. Parson Allen paid his debt to the boy's father, all right, before the ould man died. Sure, it's not in me heart now to bear the lad a grudge on Norine's account. 'Tis the true word—' all's well that ends well '."

CHAPTER VII

The same bracing tonic filled the air, and the same brilliancy of sun-touched frost and autumn foliage greeted the eye, as Bartley, taking his favorite rig from Rounds's livery, started soon after sunrise on Saturday for a day's trip into the logging section northwest of Midland. His first objective point was the new banking ground on the Sturgeon, the proprietors of which had bought up the scorched timber of several quarter sections near the river and were preparing to rush it to the booms before it should spoil. They were new comers in the region, without good standing as lumbermen, and interested in the business only as a passing speculation. Bartley had known them before he came to Midland and wished to renew old acquaintance, and perhaps get material for a story in *Chips*. From there he intended to go to Red-Keg, the focal point for most of the logging operations on the Tittabawassee in Midland County. Preparations were making for a rollway which, for size, should eclipse even that of two years before, which had broken all previous records. Most Red-Keggers remembered that great rollway in particular because Jim Gyde, one of the bravest and most popular young lumber-jacks of the region, had lost his life while rescuing the Midland Schoolmaster from a perilous position on the moving logs. This year all owners of timber were making strenuous efforts to clean up their holdings to save themselves from a total loss.

This unusual activity in the logging business was not, however, the thing which drew Bartley to Red-Keg. He had a keen scent for news of a certain kind,

but the fragrance of the pinelands did not tempt him, nor did the commonplace business activities of his respectable neighbors interest him deeply. If there was a scandal to be unearthed and exploited, the editor of *Chips* would drive ten miles, twenty miles if necessary, to get all the details. He had heard that Jim Bradshaw, the sawyer, was mourning the sudden disappearance of his better half, and that Dick Shelby, the blacksmith, had shut his shop and left Red-Keg on the night train. Gossips declared that young Mrs. Bradshaw had been seen boarding the same train, and other gossips remembered incidents, real or imagined, which, gathered together and supplemented with suitable comment, would make an appetizing story for *Chips*. Bart meant to do full justice to the possibilities of the case, and as he rode out from Midland this brilliant October morning his mind was busy constructing an account of the supposed elopement which should be at least interesting. The facts, so far as obtainable, should be made to fit in to the best advantage with his story.

The loss Bartley had just suffered in the burning out of his paper did not depress him now that the first rage excited by the event had subsided, and the annoyance of issuing a censored paper from Brinton's office had passed. He had already thought of several ways to turn the fire to profitable account. The insurance would practically cover the actual loss. The publicity gained had some value as advertising. He was in a position to appeal for help in the form of new subscriptions and payment of arrears. He could even charge a premium on copies of the fire issue as a curiosity worth keeping, besides—Bartley chuckled as he thought of it—there was in that fire number, set up and printed in Brinton's office and O. K'd by Brinton himself, something which would surprise the old man when he should find it out, and would turn the laugh away from Bartley and upon

his dignified contemporary. Other things, equally interesting, occupied the editor's mind. Among them was the probability that he might have to go to Detroit on particular business within a day or two. Events would very soon determine. So busy was he with his thoughts that the glories of the sky, the gorgeous colors of the autumn foliage, the mysterious voices of the woodland, the fragrance of the pines wherever the fire had spared them, were none of them observed as he drove quickly out through country and the forest.

His errand with MacMurtrie & Davis at the Sturgeon banking ground was quickly attended to, and a bundle of *Chips* was disposed of among the men. He wished to reach Red-Keg before noon, if possible, and that meant nine miles pretty fast travelling.

"Hear anything about Bradshaw's wife running away with Dick Shelby?" he inquired of Joe Davis as he untied his horse.

"Yes; that fellow they call Red Lampheer was up here yesterday and told us about it. He said Bradshaw was badly cut up and ready to fight if anyone looked at him crosswise. I suppose you'll be giving us the whole story in *Chips* next week?"

"Well, you just better believe!"

"Take care the injured husband doesn't get after you."

"Rubbish! Let him rattle around if he likes; just so much the more fun—and news," sneered Bartley as he jumped into his buckboard and drove off.

The big dinner gong had just sounded at the tavern when Bartley drove into Red-Keg and put up his horse in the tavern barn. The men were assembling from all sides. Red-Keg was the gateway to the woods of the Tittabawassee logging region and the terminus of the railway. There was, therefore, a motley crowd of lumber-jacks, railroad construction crews, agents for the

boom company and for Saginaw supply houses, as well as the usual hangers on with no particular vocation, but ready for anything that might turn up. Down by the river, the other side of the railroad tracks, men were preparing the banking ground for the great rollway; others were laying boom logs for the Saginaw Boom Company. Some of the men had been engaged by Sam Hawkins or his contractors for the winter's work in his woods, and were staying in Red-Keg until winter should set in. Many men belonging to other crews were waiting for the same purpose. Among these rough backwoodsmen Bartley found admirers and patrons who relished the careless, defiant manner in which he handled, in *Chips*, everybody and everything that came in for a share of his attention. There were not a few, also, who, having personally received a share of such attention, to their exceeding discomfort, hated him warmly and cast threatening looks in his direction when he appeared at the tavern.

Pushing, shouting, laughing, swearing, heavy boots pounding and shuffling on the bare floor, the noisy crowd of lumber-jacks and others jostled their way into the big bare dining room—bare of all things but the one great essential—a hearty meal heaped on four long tables, enough for all; yet every man set to with a desperate eagerness which seemed to speak of a fear that unless he immediately possessed himself of his share he would have to go hungry.

Bartley took a seat at the far end of one of the tables, and found himself flanked on the left by three of Sam Hawkins's lieutenants, Pete Murray, Joel Bailey, and Ros Whitmore, and on the right by two of his own particular champions, Jack Mann and Red Lampheer, while the next man beyond them was Jim Bradshaw. The unfortunate grass-widower was looking glum and had little to say. His wife was an excellent cook, and

he had no one to keep house for him in her absence. It was only this most unpleasant extremity which drove him to eat his meals at the tavern.

Conversation for the first few moments was limited to monosyllabic grunts, or requests for some dish out of reach, but by degrees, as the inner man became less demonstrative in his clamorings, the outer man grew more communicative. Bartley chatted and joked with the two men on his right, finding those on his left uncongenial.

"I heard tell there was suthin' hot about Jesse Brinton in *Chips* this week," said Jack Mann inquiringly.

"Why, how could there be?" replied Bartley in mock protest. "The old man nosed over everything that went into the paper. Had to use his type, you know, and he was afraid it might melt if it set up anything warm."

"All the same, it might be true. Trust you to get it in if you had a mind to. Remember that prize conundrum you asked one time, an' them verses with the answer? That was rich."

Bartley laughed heartily. "Well, maybe if you look hard enough you'll find something that doesn't quite appear at first glance. Got a paper? Never mind, take this," and Bartley pulled a copy out of his pocket.

Jack took the sheet and hunted up and down the columns for some minutes. "Don't see nothin," he said at last. "Where in blazes is it?"

"Give the paper here," said Bart, and turning it upside down he pointed to the little sermon on "Morality" which seemed to contain so many typographical errors. "See those slanting letters there, turned the other way from the rest? Just pick them out, one by one, and see what they say."

Jack studied the type industriously for several minutes, a broad grin spreading over his face as he deciph-

ered the puzzle, then threw back his head in a loud guffaw.

"Hey, fellers, listen to this," he cried. The boisterous conversation was interrupted for some little distance down the table, and Jack held up the copy of *Chips*.

"You know Bart's paper was burned out last Wednesday and he had to print this week's copy in *The Pioneer* shop. Old man Brinton made him show down all his cards, an' put his O. K. to every piece before he'd let it go in the paper; but Bart, here, had an ace up his sleeve that the old man didn't spot, an' he played it on the sly. Here's a pretty little sermon on Morality that must of made Brinton think Bart was turnin' parson. Turn the thing upside-down, an' presto! look at the jolt the old man gets. Here's what it says, startin' at the tail end: 'Old Brinton is a moss-covered hypercrite an' a conceited fool, with 'bout as much morality in his carcass as a sick cat', or suthin' like that; you kin pick the letters out yourself. It's right here in print."

A roar of laughter greeted the speaker from Bartley's friends; but there were not wanting black looks and mutterings of disgust from other listeners.

"Bet that'll make Jesse Brinton bite hard."

"He'll know better than to poke the hornet's nest another time."

"Mighty small, dirty trick."

"Warmed a snake, an' it bit him."

On all sides, the opinions, complimentary or contemptuous, were freely expressed, while Bart, flattered by the one and indifferent to the other, listened with a complacent smile as he went on eating his dinner.

"Just been over to the Sturgeon to see MacMurtrie & Davis," he said presently in an undertone to Red Lampheer. "They said you were there yesterday. Anything——?" Glancing toward Pete Murray on his

left, he lowered his voice almost to a whisper and continued talking for some minutes. Suddenly he caught a few words of the conversation on his left and stopped to listen without turning his head.

"Yes," Ros Whitmore was saying, "I'm sure of it, 'cause John Maloney told me, an' he knows. Don't s'pose there's any secret. Sam, he ain't cut out for farmin', an' when he gets his logs all to the river, he's goin' to sell the hull place fer what he can get an' go into business in Midland. Thet's why he's after the Hammond lot jest to the east of the gully in Paddy Hollow."

"Hope the bye ain't makin' a mistake," said Pete Murray. "It's the foine, likely lad he is since—since he came out o' the fire."

"I know thet there Hammond lot," said Joel Bailey. "He war a shiftless chap, Hammond war, an' mortgaged the piece to thet pair o' loan sharks, Dominie & Son, in Detroit. Then he spent the money foolish, an' couldn't liquidate when the time come; so the Dominies gobbled it in. Ain't worth much, fer's I can see, not fer farmin', an' ain't much timber on the hull forty acres. Can't jest see what Sam wants of it."

"No, like enough ye can't; but Sam does, an' he has a knack o' findin' things where other folks ain't in the habit o' lookin' fer 'em." Ros laughed a little, and added, "I don't mean this is another Mystic Isle. Sam's out for square business this time."

"What has he found, then?"

"Wall, I don't spose it's a secret, or he wouldn't told Maloney, but maybe he'd just as lief it wouldn't get around; leastways not till he makes sure o' the prop'ty," said Ros, hesitating. "'Course not," said Joel impatiently. "Me an' Pete ain't likely to blab. Now you've said so much, ye may as well out with the rest." Joel's natural inquisitiveness had been aroused and

was given keener edge by Whitmore's mysterious hesitation.

Ros glanced hastily around. No one seemed to be paying any attention to their conversation. Bartley was turned the other way and appeared to be talking with Red Lampheer. Ros could not know that his ears were straining eagerly to catch every word, so he leaned closer to Pete and Joel and said impressively.

"Salt!"

"Whist!" said Pete under his breath. He had noticed a peculiar stiffening of Bartley's neck and the least suggestion of a change in the position of his head. But Ros mistook the warning for an exclamation of surprise. Joel was eager to hear more.

"Yes," continued Ros, "Sam was out that way last month an' found the salt bubblin' right up in the middle of the gully where the brook runs through, an' he's goin' ter sink a well right there when he gets a holt o' the land from Dominie & Son."

"Aisy, Ros, aisy," whispered Pete. "That devil to yer right is listenin', or I'm a sinner."

Ros turned quickly, but Bartley was talking earnestly to Red Lampheer. "He didn't hear nothin', I guess," he said, "but don't you let it go any farther. Maybe I oughtn't to told, but Maloney never said 'twas a secret."

"What's Bart up to?" broke in Joel. "He's gettin' Jim Bradshaw riled up over suthin'."

Bartley had just been telling his friends that the next number of *Chips* would be "a hummer." All the juicy morsels ruled out by Brinton would be printed, and, besides, a full account, with all the details secured by personal investigation, of the sensational elopement of two prominent residents of Red-Keg. Jim Bradshaw had overheard the announcement, as perhaps Bartley had intended he should. An angry flush crept over his

face. Slowly he laid down his knife and fork and glared at Bartley in silence for a moment.

"Bill Bartley," he said at last with deliberate emphasis, "I ask ye to cut out all mention o' my family affairs in your paper. They ain't nobody's business but mine."

Bartley smiled in his most friendly manner. "Of course I couldn't do that, Jim; news is news, and I'm publishing a newspaper. This is the liveliest piece of news Red-Keg has supplied us for months—we must make the most of it. Perhaps you can give us a few inside facts. Always like to get them first hand, you know, if convenient; then we can be sure they're true. That's the next best thing to being interesting."

Bradshaw gripped the edge of the table and pushed back his chair. "Look here, Bart, I forbid ye to print a word about the affair. Is that plain?"

This time Bartley laughed good-naturedly. "Well, I declare, my dear fellow, you ought to be editor of *The Pioneer*. Been taking lessons from old man Brinton, haven't you? Sorry I must remind you that the next number of *Chips* will be printed in my own office, and I do not allow any man to tell me what shall go in or stay out. Brinton had the advantage of his temporary monopoly of printing facilities, but even he got more than he bargained for. Why, of course I shall print the story of the runaway lovers. Sorry you decline to grant me an interview; but I'll state that your bashful and retiring nature caused you to deplore the publicity and free advertising. Who knows? perhaps the advertising may bring you other applicants for the matrimonial vacancy."

Bradshaw had sprung to his feet in a rage as Bartley was applying the lash, and a score or more of the men who had finished their dinner pushed back their chairs to watch the row.

"I'll grant ye an interview, ye blackguard," cried the angry husband, shaking his fist at Bartley, "an' it'll be an interview ye'll not be likely to print in yer dirty sheet. Here it is; come an' get it."

Jim's brother Tom, and another man, his friend, had joined Jim ready to back him up if a fight developed.

"Oh, thank you!" said Bartley politely. "If you mean a fight, I shall have the pleasure of adding to my story of the elopement the sad details of how the husband was whipped by a smaller man."

Bartley had risen leisurely to his feet and was dusting the crumbs from his colored waistcoat as he spoke. No such thing as a fight seemed imminent, to judge by his apparent careless indifference. Suddenly, light as a cat, and as noiseless, he sprang at Bradshaw. His fist flashed upward at the same instant and caught his antagonist squarely under the jaw, and the heavy lumberman fell with a crash to the floor.

"Rather brief interview," remarked Bartley, apologetically. "It will take all the editor's descriptive ability to make a stickfull. Couldn't you give us a little more?"

Jim's two backers had been momentarily stupefied by the thunderbolt which had stricken down the big fellow whose fight they had made their own; but Bartley's mocking words aroused them again. With cries of rage they sprang at him.

"Here's more! You'll get a belly full this time," yelled Bradshaw No. 2.

Bartley without appearing to retreat, had found a place for his back against the wall near where he had been sitting. His short stature and slight build placed him seemingly at a decided disadvantage against heavy weights; but his lightning quickness and skill at boxing made him more than a match for either of the men. As long as he could deal with them one at a time he had

nothing to fear. Tom Bradshaw had jumped in ahead of the other man, and Bartley met his onrush with a daintily delivered blow which landed on his face like a shot from a catapult and sent him staggering against his friend. The dining room was in an uproar, men from all sides crowding around to see the fight. Thus far there was no disposition to interfere, as Bartley seemed for the moment, at least, to be capable of holding his own, and his friends in the crowd of rough men were at least as numerous as his enemies. Remarks of all sorts came thick and fast.

"Plucky little devil!"

"Great Scott! but he's a hitter. Jim's twice his weight."

"Quicker'n greased lightnin'".

"What's it all about?"

"Here, you! Here, you!" yelled the tavern keeper, running in from the bar-room. "If ye're goin' ter fight, clear out o' here; ye'll have all my dishes broke. Outside with ye—or the bar-room, anyhow," he added with an eye to business.

Bartley was sufficiently cool to catch the suggestion. "Thank you, landlord; that's a very good idea; but I'm too busy just now. A little later my friend and I will join you in a social glass—ah, you wish to continue the ——" His careless bravado had carried him a little too far. In the brief instant that his attention had been diverted to the landlord the third of his attackers had slipped out of his immediate line of vision, and before Bartley could stop him or complete his sentence, a heavy blow on the side of the head caused him to reel against the wall. Instinctively his guard went up, and the second blow was parried, but all the jaunty lightness and good nature had gone from his fight. With a snarl of rage he bent low and hurled himself head first against the man who had hit him. His head struck the fellow

below the waist, and he would have gone down, if Tom who had recovered his equilibrium, had not steadied him. Then both together they rushed upon Bartley and bore him struggling to the floor.

Red Lampheer and Jack Mann had been watching every move, and as long as Bartley had the best of the situation they held off; but now they felt it was time to go to his rescue.

"Break away there!" cried Jack, grabbing one of the men by the collar and yanking him off from Bartley.

"Here, you! Ef this is what ye want, take it," said Lampheer, giving Tom Bradshaw a mighty cuff on the ear that sent him spinning away and left Bartley free to rise to his feet.

"That lets me in!" exclaimed big Pete Murray, who had been fidgeting uneasily. "Tom Bradshaw's a friend o' moine, an' I'll not lave him to be knocked about by the loikes av you," and he gave Red a gentle tap with his massive fist just to call his attention to a foe who could not be rolled around the floor like a plaything. Red squared off with blood in his eye, only too ready to accept the challenge. Fighting was the one thing he enjoyed next to drinking. Indeed, the fighting promised to become general in a very short time, as one after another took sides for or against Bartley or those already embroiled. Sam Hawkins, who had just entered the room, sought to call his men off. There was too much at stake to risk destroying the efficiency of any good men by a fight just before the season opened.

Pete Murray did not hear Sam's hail in the excitement of his encounter with Red Lampheer, and Joel and Ros called back to Sam that they would be with him in a minute; but Bartley, who was free for the instant, felt all his insolence return as he caught sight of Sam near the door.

"Here comes the brand from the burning, boys," he shouted. "Trying to play peacemaker. If we'll all sit down in rows and fold our hands the little hypocrite will sing us one of his favorite psalms. Say, boys, if any of you ever get nabbed robbing the mails, or killing your wife, or making moonshine, just roll your eyes and pretend you've got religion, and they'll let you off and make a leading citizen of you—Hallo, there, Hawkins, where do you keep your Mystic Brand nowadays? I'm thirsty."

Sam Hawkins, white with anger and shame, clenched his fists and started to join in the fight he had tried to stop.

"You hound!" he exclaimed. "You judge every one else by your own black heart. If you're so anxious for a beating, just stand out here and I'll give it to you."

Ros Whitmore at once forced his way through the crowd to Sam. "Come on out of this mess," he said, hurriedly. "There ain't one of us cares what that blackguard says; 'twon't hurt ye a mite; better not be mixin' in with him." As he talked, he gradually forced the unwilling young man out of the room with him. He knew that when Sam's passionate indignation had cooled he would be sorry if he had been engaged in a tavern fight.

Meanwhile Joel Bailey had taken up Sam's fight for him. "Reckon ye'll hev to pay for thet little fun," he drawled, crowding up to Bartley and giving him a powerful slap on the mouth with the palm of his hand. The tide of sympathy had somewhat turned against Bartley for his unprovoked assault upon Sam Hawkins who was fast making friends in Red-Keg. The prospect for a free-for-all fight had passed, and only the few immediately concerned in Bradshaw's quarrel continued active hostilities. Bartley was in danger of being overwhelmed with the sheer force of weight and numbers,

and his two particular allies had their own hands too full to help him make an escape. Suddenly Pete Murray and Red Lampheer, in their struggle, reeled against the low window, and the sash went out with a crash. Pete made instant use of the situation, and with a quick dive caught Red by the knees and tumbled him bodily through the broken window to the sloping bank below, where he rolled some ten feet away before recovering himself. Bartley was close to the side of the window with his back against the wall. In an instant he saw his opportunity as well as his desperate straits. With a lightning-like movement his fists shot out and cleared a space in front of him. Then he bent his head and drove his body like a battering ram against Pete Murray's side, causing him to stagger away from the open window for a moment. Leaping to the ledge, the editor turned to the crowd in the tavern for a last show of defiance.

"This is my busy day. If you want any more interviews, come to my office in Midland. Bye, bye!"

In a twinkling, William Harrington Bartley, editor and publisher of *Chips*, had kissed his hand, airily, to the throng of lumber-jacks, and sprang lightly to the ground outside the tavern.

The whistle at the shingle mill blew loud and long, and all hands hurried away to work.

CHAPTER VIII

Quick work during the three days following the fire had restored the printing room of *Chips* sufficiently to permit work to be resumed. Carpenters were still busy repairing the floor and other woodwork, and the compositors were busy Monday morning laying several cases of new type which had arrived Saturday night from Detroit. The Washington press had not been seriously damaged, and after a good cleaning and oiling it would be ready, with a set of new rollers, for printing the next issue of *Chips*. Bartley had, early that morning, given Crawford a big handful of copy, including many of the items omitted the previous week, and a new sensational story which he had just written. That week's issue was to be " a hummer."

Heavy steps came pounding up the stairs from the street about nine o'clock. In a moment the door was thrown open and a burley lumber-jack strode in, carrying his horsewhip in one hand. He glared around threateningly.

" Is Bill Bartley in? " he demanded from Jake Crawford who stepped toward him.

" Nope, he's out of town."

" Out o' town, is he? What do ye mean by that? Red-Keg an' Midland gettin' too hot for him? "

" Not 's I know of. He went to Detroit on the eight o'clock train this morning to see about getting some new things for the shop here. So fer as getting hot is concerned, I reckon he's a pretty good hand himself at making things hot for some people. Anything I can do for you? "

" When's Bart comin' back? "

"Maybe tonight, ten o'clock; maybe tomorrow afternoon, 'cording to how quick he can do his business."

"Wall, I can't wait; but you tell Bill Bartley for me that I don't take back a word o' what I told him Saturday up to the Keg. I won't stand for none of his slander an' sarcasm about me an' my wife. Ef he puts any o' thet rot o' his'n in his dirty paper, I calc'late to make it so blame hot for him he'll think he's dead an' where he belongs!"

"All right, Mr—er—Bradshaw? I'll tell Bart. Like enough he'll be scared to death by what you say—he always is by that sort o' thing. By the way, he gave me the story of the elopement—that's what you mean, isn't it?—just before he went away. I'll have it set up ready for him to read when he comes back. No doubt he'll order it killed when he hears you object to it."

Bradshaw looked at the foreman doubtfully; the angry gleam in his eyes did not fade, but he did not quite know how to take Crawford's remarks.

"Ain't no cause for any killin' thet I know of unless he prints what I've told him not to 'bout me an' my wife. Ef he does, it'll not be him thet orders the killin', but me." Bradshaw cracked his whip savagely to emphasize his warning, and then stomped heavily down the stairs to his waiting buckboard.

Crawford, with a grin at young Chabington, was returning to his work when a well-dressed alert-looking man stepped briskly into the office and glanced sharply from one to another of the men.

"Is Mr. W. H. Bartley in?" he inquired.

"No, sir, he's out of town," replied Crawford.

"I thought he was to be here this morning."

"Well, he generally is; but he had to hurry to Detroit to get some new things for the shop. Most everything was burned last week."

"Ah, yes, I see; and when will he return?"

"Expect him late tonight; but maybe he won't be here till tomorrow afternoon."

"Thank you; I'll drop in tomorrow morning."

The stranger nodded shortly and hurried off.

"Wonder who he is and what he has up his sleeve for Bart," said Crawford to Nell Tompkins.

"He don't belong anywhere about here," replied the girl. "I never saw him before; but I noticed he had a copy of *Chips* and *The Pioneer*. Like enough he's up to some job for Mr. Brinton."

About one o'clock of the same day, Bartley was walking hurriedly along Woodward Avenue in the city of Detroit. His eyes shone with the gambler's excitement as he glanced searchingly at the numbers and signs along the way. In front of a certain building he stopped short and surveyed the office windows for a moment before entering. The lettering on one large window read:

DOMINIE AND SON,

Real Estate, City and Country

Money to Loan.

Throwing back his shoulders, Bartley stepped briskly up the stoop and opened the office door. A dapper young man slipped down from a high desk stool and approached him.

"I wish to see one of the firm," said Bartley, handing a card to the young man, who immediately retired to an inner office.

In a moment the door was thrown open again and a dignified, middle-aged gentleman, with side whiskers, piercing eyes, and a bland smile stood on the threshold looking first at the card and then at Bartley.

"Mr. Dominie?" queried Bartley.

"Ah—m—yes, sir; that's my name, Mr.—ah—Bartley. Don't wish to be presumptive; no offense, I hope, but, ah—m—W. H. Bartley, Midland—are you the Bartley who—ah—m—I really must beg pardon; I——"

"My dear sir, don't mention it; I am undoubtedly the one you mean, at your service." Bartley bowed politely and smiled effusively.

"But sir—ah—m—we can do no business with you. We do not advertise; we do not subscribe to newspaper charity enterprises; we do not buy stock in investment ventures; we——"

"Sell real estate, more probably," interrupted Bartley without a particle of resentment in his tone or manner.

"Yes, sir; just so, that's our business."

"Precisely as I understood. Now, as it happens, I took a run down here partly to see what you could do for me on real estate up my way. I believe you have several holdings near Midland?"

"Plenty of them. Ah—m—won't you step into my private office and be seated, Mr. Bartley; then we'll be free from interruptions." The temperature in the room seemed suddenly to change from winter to summer. "Mr. Howard, please bring the Midland County book in here with you."

The young man at the high desk reached for a record book and joined them, shutting the door behind him.

"Now, Mr. Bartley, this property——"

The office boy poked his head into the office and announced: "A lady out here to see you, sir."

"Get her name, James; and, remember, I must not be disturbed unless the matter is imperative."

In a moment the boy returned with the name written with pencil on the back of an envelope.

"Ah—m—James, tell her I am very busy with an out-of-town client just now, and cannot tell when I shall be

at liberty. She will have to come some other day. One of the annoying features of the business," he remarked to Bartley when the boy had gone out. "This woman is especially troublesome. Her husband secured a loan from me two years ago; died; payment overdue; I told his wife I should be compelled to foreclose; very desirable residential property; sorry for her, of course, but too much sentiment hurts the business. Her persistent calls and tearful appeals are wearying. She isn't the worst, though. Why, would you believe it? only last month one woman in a similar case actually pointed a loaded revolver at me; had to have her forcibly removed. M—ah, this is a little digression from the business in hand. This property in Midland you wish is——?"

"Oh, no particular piece. I knew you held quite a number of properties out in that vicinity. Thought I'd see whether you have anything that will suit me."

"Ah—m—want a farm, or business property? We have some choice bargains either way."

"What I'm looking for is a small farm as near to the city as possible, not less than twenty acres; not more than forty; watered with brook or good springs."

"M—Howard, let's see what we have that will fit the case—ah—how would this do—thirty acres on the Sturgeon river about two miles north of Midland? There was a fine stand of timber there; but that is gone, I suppose. You can get the piece cheap."

"Just make a note of that," said Bartley. "It might be worth looking up; but have you nothing nearer the village?"

"Oh, yes," said Howard, turning the leaves of the record book. "Here is a forty-acre plot right on the Midland line—the Hammond place, you know, Mr. Dominie."

"To be sure; excellent; but it occurs to me we have an option pending on that—haven't we, Howard?"

"Yes, sir; a Mr. Hawkins; but he has not replied to our last letter. Perhaps he has decided to let it drop."

"Ah—m—I see. Well, we have given Mr. Hawkins ample time to state his intentions. We are not bound to wait his pleasure indefinitely. If the property would suit you, Mr. Bartley, we will let you have it, provided you are ready to sign a preliminary contract at once."

"Well, that depends. I had no idea of buying so soon, but I might do so if necessary. But this Hammond property—have you a full description of it? I know about where it is, I believe, but from what little idea I have of it, I should hardly regard it as good farm land, though of course, I may be mistaken."

"Quite sure you are, my dear sir. Our record of the place says 'well adapted to farming.' It is splendidly located right on the border of the village—part of it, in fact, is within the village limits. Let me see—m—'a fine spring brook runs through the property from north to south'—just what you want, Mr. Bartley, just what you want; the best thing on our books, and a bargain."

"What's it worth?"

"M—say six thousand dollars."

"Don't want it. What else have you?"

"Well, now, Mr. Bartley, you would make no mistake in taking this property. Mind, I only said it is *worth* six thousand. For a quick purchaser, I could quote a much lower figure, indeed far less than its real value."

"Let's get to rock bottom, then, right away. I may decide to postpone any action in the matter unless I find a *real* bargain, and I haven't much time today. Want to catch the four o'clock train, and I have other business to attend to before then." Bartley spoke brusquely and looked at his watch.

"Just one moment, Mr. Bartley, and I am sure we can get together. Howard, let me see the record of this

property." After consulting the book for awhile he closed it, leaned confidentially toward Bartley, and, twirling his spectacles around his finger, said in a low tone, "It is a shame to sacrifice a fine piece of farm land so near the village; but we were so fortunate as to get it for half its value. Speak quick, and you can have it for two thousand dollars."

"Two much," said Bartley rising. "The land may be worth it; but I think I can do better by waiting. However, I'll give you a thousand dollars if you care to let the place go for that?"

Mr. Dominie threw up his hands in horror, and looked at his clerk as though expecting him to do the same. He also rose from his chair and reached for the handle of the door to the outer office.

"Mr. Bartley, you astonish me. I assure you Dominie & Son are in the business of selling real estate not of giving it away. Sorry to have detained you. Let me see, you have two hours and a quarter for your other business before train time. Whenever you are in Detroit, stop in; glad to see you any time."

The two men were standing on the threshold between the outer and inner offices. Before Bartley could pass out, the other whispered in his ear, "It is just possible we might consider fifteen hundred today, but I assure you, there'll never be such a chance again."

Bartley breathed deeply. He had, for the moment, been somewhat alarmed. He had met his match at bluffing. Still he would not show any weakening. He stood hesitating, looked at his watch again, pulled one end of his mustache into his mouth and gnawed on it for a while, and then said slowly, "I'll think it over. I may conclude to buy at that price after having a look at the property."

"Ah—m—remember, Mr. Bartley, that option may be taken up tomorrow."

"Not likely," said Bartley.

"You know Mr. Hawkins, I suppose?"

"Slightly, only. He lives up in the woods somewhere in the Red-Keg region, I believe. I shouldn't expect to see him buying anything. His father left him more land than he knows what to do with. He must have been fooling with you." Bartley turned to go, hesitated, and turned back again. "If you have any further details of the place you might let me know them before I go."

An hour later Bartley left the office of Dominie & Son with an exultant look on his face. Buttoned safely in his inside pocket was a contract which he unconsciously patted caressingly from the outside of his coat. "The old fool doesn't know what he's lost," he chuckled. "He thought he could bluff me, but I guess when he reads the next chapter of this little story he'll make up his mind that he isn't in the game. Fifteen hundred! mere song! I'll make fifteen thousand out of it inside of a year."

In the office of Dominie & Son, self-felicitation was equally cordial. The ministerial-looking real estate and loan shark smiled graciously at Howard as the door closed on the departing visitor.

"Pretty good stroke, eh, Howard? Got a cool half thousand more than the Hawkins option called for. Don't care now whether this Mr. Bartley takes title or not. The five hundred he paid on the contract gives us back all we loaned on the property, anyhow. If he doesn't come to time, we can sell it over again. I've heard that Mr. Bartley is a sly customer; but he never rubbed up against Dominie & Son before. Put up the book, Howard."

CHAPTER IX

SUNDAY dinner at the Hawkins farm had always been a glad occasion for Robert Allen when Josiah and Susan were alive. The couple had been his dearest friends. He owed them more, far more, than his life. Part of the debt had been repaid in Sam, their only son. During Allen's tireless labors as self-appointed preacher and missionary among the roving lumber-jacks and the pioneer farmers of the Red-Keg region, the Hawkins homestead had always been open to him to use as his home, or as a place for neighborhood meetings. Farmer Hawkins and Mother Hawkins loved to help him in every way possible and watched with glad and thankful hearts his self-sacrificing, unassuming, yet fruitful work. Now that both were gone, Robert Allen could not escape a great feeling of loneliness as he sat at the well-known table. He strove to conceal it for the sake of Sam and his pretty, devoted little wife Lettie. There had been a time when Sam shunned the quiet, forceful man who had taken hold of his careless life and turned it into new channels. That time was passed. Now he needed him; he feared to be long away from his steadying influence, and Parson Allen, as he was everywhere affectionately called, was glad to hold him up and walk with him until he should learn to rely upon stronger help, unseen. Therefore he came, as before, to the Hawkins farm and filled the place of father and elder brother to the young man struggling to shake off his old life. Bad habits and weaknesses could not be gotten rid of in a day. The new order of things was not firmly established and Sam walked, at times, somewhat uncertainly,

though with the earnest will to be a man. Allen watched confidently for the time when Sam should "find himself" and realize the mighty power which was his to use. The minister had a plan for bringing this thing to pass. He only waited the right opportunity.

A depressing influence of some kind hung over the dinner table that beautiful Sabbath in October. Lettie was a famous cook, and Parson Allen complimented her on each appetizing dish. John Carroll, also, praised the dinner heartily, and ate with a gusto that proved his sincerity; but the young wife had not exerted her skill to win praise from John Carroll, and even Parson Allen's compliments were not enough. She looked wistfully at Sam and waited for his recognition of her wifely proficiency. He had fallen into the habit of acknowledging it without reserve, and the pleasure his whole-hearted appreciation gave her was ample reward for all her efforts, and a stimulus for new ones. But Sam was silent and gloomy, and appeared not to notice even the first pumpkin pie of the season upon which so much of Lettie's talents and expectations had been centered. What dreadful thing could have happened, she wondered, to make him unmindful of that wonderful pumpkin pie? A tear began to gather on her lashes, but she quickly brushed it away and entered bravely into conversation with Parson Allen and John Carroll. Allen chatted brightly of his plans for the winter and questioned Sam concerning his arrangements for cleaning up his logs. Every detail interested the minister, himself an experienced logger, and he commended Sam's forethought in securing the services of Whitmore, Maloney, and Murray, who would combine with their expert ability a personal interest in the result of Sam's enterprise. To all questions and remarks addressed directly to him Sam replied politely, but very briefly, and volunteered no remarks of his own. But Allen would

not let the conversation lag. He smiled encouragingly at Lettie, and led John Carroll on to tell of his sister Bessie and his plans for bringing her on from Pennsylvania in the Spring if he could get a place for her with Mr. Brinton.

"It's all right, little woman," he said cheerily to Lettie, following her into the kitchen for a moment after dinner. "Don't worry. If it's a sore tooth, we'll have it out before supper time, and if it's something else we'll have that out before supper. You ought to be proud of that dinner, madam; it was fit for a king."

"The king didn't seem to think so," she said, laughing to hide a sob.

"Oh, yes he did; he couldn't help it, and I'll warrant he'll tell you so before long. For the moment he was preoccupied, that's all," and Allen went off in search of the young man who had been enthroned king in this brave little woman's loyal heart.

"Come, Sam; out with it, my boy," he exclaimed, without preamble, as soon as he found him alone. "Whatever it is, it seems terrible only because you keep it covered up. Trot it out into this glorious October sunlight, and all its terrors will vanish. Don't you remember when a little tot, how in a dark place at night, every object seemed a monster and every black corner seemed full of goblins and ghosts; but the instant a light was lit the evil things disappeared and you saw there was nothing there at all? Now let's light up your ghost chamber, Sam, and examine the things that are troubling you. Come up into my room where we can be alone. The South sun pours in there, you know."

"It's not a joking matter, Mr. Allen; but the ghost is there, and I can't get away from it. Sunlight or darkness makes no difference; in fact, it's worse in daylight, because I can't hide my face. I'm discouraged, clean discouraged—that's the size of it. I've

been trying hard to be decent, and make the folks around here forget; but I can't get away from the ghost of my past; I can't seem to live it down, no matter what I do, or don't do. I'm shamed everywhere. One day I feel as if I could stand up straight at last and look folks in the face, and the next day everything I ever did is thrown at me in public, and I have to slink off hanging my head in shame because I can't deny anything. I've about made up my mind there's no use trying any longer around here. I'll have to go off somewhere among people who don't know me at all, and try to make a new start."

"Hold on a minute; you haven't told me what happened," said Allen, as he gave Sam a chair and seated himself on the bed.

"Well, it's that disgusting fellow Bartley, editor——"

"Are you quite satisfied to use the adjective, Sam?"

The young man colored hotly. "I can't help it. He seems bound to drive me to desperation. I suppose you mean that I'm not the one to call names. You see, even you have to remind me of what I was."

"Tell me what Bartley said," answered Allen quietly.

Sam told the whole story of his meeting with Bartley the day before, of the insulting taunts, and of his own hot rejoinder, "I can't imagine what has set him against me," he added; "I never had any kind of dealings with him; but he seems determined to humiliate me and fight me on every possible occasion."

"You have a hard fight on hand, Sam; I can see that; but surely you are not the man to run away from a fight. What soldier ever won his straps that way? Just stay right here and put up the best fight you know how, and if you want any help, I'll back you up all I can."

"Oh, if it comes to that," replied Sam in some surprise, "I'm not afraid to tackle Bartley alone, even if

he is such a wonder with his fists. I never dreamt of running away. I wanted to fight him yesterday, the worst kind, but Ros Whitmore wouldn't let me. I wish to goodness I had, now; but I hardly expected you to advise me to fight him."

"Dear me! I said nothing about fighting *him. You're* the fellow you've got to tackle, and, as I say, it's going to be a hard fight; but the victory will be worth while when it comes."

"What has my struggle got to do with Bartley? I never did anything to him, and I'm trying the best I can to do right myself. I think he might let me alone."

"Perhaps you need him, Sam. Very likely you can't get along without him."

"You do love riddles, Mr. Allen. How in the world can Bartley be necessary to me? I'm sure I'd be only too glad to get along without ever seeing or hearing from him."

"My dear fellow, I take it you want to grow a good, strong, manly Christian character. Isn't that so?"

"Yes, of course."

"Well, then, the opposition and plaguing you get from Bartley is the very thing that will help you. It is easy enough to be good when everything is pleasant and calm and there is nothing to worry and stir us up; but it isn't easy to grow strong in such conditions, nor to be sure that we are firmly established. Go out into your own forest and notice how straight and tall some of those big pines grew in among others of their kind, sheltered, and supported, and encouraged to lift their own heads high toward the heavens by the fact that all around them tall pine trees were doing the same thing. But just see what happened when the fire came and licked up the carpet of needles over their roots and denuded the branches, and then the tornado struck the flame-stripped trees. Down they went, thousands of

them, prone to the ground. They could not withstand the first good hard blow of an adverse wind. Their roots had been spread out in the shallow soil close to the surface; they had not struck into and taken a grip upon the hard-pan deeper down. It was too easy for them to grow into nice handsome trees. There was nothing to compel a more rugged growth. They were big, and straight, and pleasing to the eye, but take away their surrounding friends and expose them to the storm, and they had no strength to withstand its buffetings. Their hold on their foundation was shallow and superficial. They were not established.

"Go out to some bleak hillside and examine the sturdy oak standing exposed to every gale that blows. No pounding nor tugging of the storm can throw it down. It is established. Its roots spread wide, but they also strike deep; they twine themselves around a rock, they pierce the hard-pan. All this didn't happen at once. It has been a process of years. Every time the tree has felt the storm tugging, it has sent its roots a little deeper into the subsoil, or has gripped a little tighter upon the rock. Their limbs are mighty and full of rugged strength, because they have been through many a hard battle. The strength to withstand and conquer has grown with the very act of withstanding and fighting. It is the need itself which has produced the strength to meet it; and nothing but the need could have forced the tree to do that which would meet the need. You see the point, Sam; do you want to be the pine, tall and symmetrical, but standing in shallow foothold and liable to be blown over by any gale, or the sturdy oak which no angry wind can move, because it has a firm grip on a sure foundation? Don't you see now how Bartley may be really a necessity to you in your effort to develop a strong manly character? The pine fell easily because it had not been buffeted by hostile winds

ever since it was a sapling. Some good saints may be wafted to heaven on 'flowery beds of ease,' but not you and I, Sam. We can say with Paul that 'we must through much tribulation enter into the Kingdom of God.'"

"That sounds all true enough," acknowledged Sam somewhat reluctantly. "If Bartley's attacks and sneers aroused that sense of need in me which would drive me to seek strength to withstand them, why, then they might result as you say, but they don't seem to have that effect. They just make me mad and discouraged, and so ugly toward Bartley that sometimes I am afraid it is as he says, and my change of heart is not genuine nor lasting. I wish I could be sure. I really want to be genuine and to amount to something. But how can I be sure? How can I know I haven't made a mistake?"

A quick thrill of excitement shot through Parson Allen as he heard Sam's questions. The moment he had waited and longed for had come. A struggle was to begin which might make or destroy the young man, yet the minister welcomed its beginning and looked forward with trust to its ending. There was a sparkle in his eye and a ringing challenge in his voice as he replied:

"How can you know, Sam? How can you be sure? Why, simply by testing it, by proving it for yourself. There's a way to do it." He leaned forward and took hold of Sam's arm with an eager grasp. "How does the athlete know whether he is in perfect condition for the contest? He puts himself to the test, does he not, to see whether he can perform the task? How does the inventor know whether his machine is built rightly? He tries it to see whether it will do the work expected of it. What is a man built for, Sam? Is he put together, soul in body, just to walk around and look as handsome as he can? Not much! Every man, like every machine,

is made and set in his place to do some particular thing; but unlike the machine, he is given power to decide whether or not he will do that thing. I read in the papers not long ago of a man who invented a flying machine. He had studied and theorized for years. He believed that he had mastered the principles of aerial navigation, and his big machine was wonderful to look upon. The great wings, the little wheels, the wires, the delicately adjusted joints were all made and put together with the greatest skill and care. The inventor pointed out each separate part and told just what its function was, and spoke enthusiastically of the great thing the whole machine was going to do. Then he came to the actual test, and called upon his machine to fly. This was the one particular work for which it had been created, but it couldn't do the work. It wasn't the machine's fault; it was the inability of the inventor to adapt his contrivance to its work. God never makes a man to do a particular piece of work without giving him the ability to do it; and God never throws a man at random into the whirl of life to tumble here and there until he falls by chance into some groove of usefulness or mischief. When a man becomes a Christian, Sam, he solemnly asserts by that very act that he will do the thing he has been put into the world to do. There must be something waiting for you, the doing of which will prove the genuineness of your purpose. It may be a hard thing—all right, so much the better will be the proof. Whatever it is, bring yourself squarely up to the test, and then you can answer for yourself the questions you have just put to me."

Sam felt his pulse quicken as something of the minister's fervor took hold of him. Almost involuntarily he exclaimed, "What is the thing I must do? Let me know and I'll do it"; then with a sudden impulse he added hastily, "that is, if it is within my power."

"You may be sure, Sam, that nothing is expected of you which is not within your power; but do not make the common mistake of declaring a thing impossible simply because it cannot be done easily. And be sure of this, too, that the thing you must do will be something that *needs* to be done. Look around you with the purpose to respond to that need and you cannot fail to recognize your task."

"But what do you think it is?" persisted the young man, fearing something, he knew not what. "You can judge such things so much better than I can. I might be wrong."

"No; when you find your work I believe you will know it beyond all doubt, and the conviction will force itself upon you with a grip you cannot escape. It is far better that you name it to yourself than that another point it out to you. Suppose, however, you were famished and dying for a drink of cold water and someone were to point out within your reach a spring of water from which you might drink your fill. Then, if you found another man dying of thirst nearby, would your duty be uncertain? Suppose you were walking a narrow path in the dark, and someone should warn you and hold you back just in time to save you from falling headlong into a bottomless pit, would you be in doubt what to do if you found another wanderer treading the same path? Suppose, Sam;" the minister's voice was growing more intense with the deep earnestness of his desire, and Sam was beginning to tremble as an unwelcome idea began to shape itself in his mind. "Suppose you were suffering with a loathsome disease, which was dragging you down helpless and hopeless into the grave, shunned by men and women, an object of fear and disgust to all; suppose then a great physician were to send to your relief one who had suffered with the same disease and had been healed, and he should bring you the

secret of health by the use of which you shook off the dreadful malady and became a clean man; what would you do if you were to see another man a victim of the same disease? Tell me, Sam, if you had the secret of health and had proved its value in your own case, would you refuse to tell it to one in like need? Would you stop to wonder what to do?"

Robert Allen looked searchingly into the young man's face. As the sun-glass gathers the rays of the noonday sun into one glowing point until they burn the thing upon which they are focused, so the minister's eyes seemed to glow and burn the questions home as he waited almost breathlessly for Sam's answer.

"You mean—Bartley?" Sam exclaimed, with a gasp. Then, as the minister remained silent, the young man poured out his protests against the task he had himself recognized. "I can't do it; the thing is utterly impossible; you must see, yourself, that it is impossible. He hates me, and I—I hate him, because he would destroy me if he could. He believes I'm a hypocrite, and he wants to make everyone else believe it. He ridicules me and insults me every chance he can get. He shamed me before all the men at Red-Keg yesterday. I feel so riled up every time I see him and every time I think of him that I sometimes think if I could only get hold of him, I would——"

"Stop, Sam!" The minister's command rang sharp and imperative. "You have named the thing you are going to do. You *can* get hold of him; I believe it. God will deliver your enemy into your hands. I shall watch for it and pray for it. It is your destiny—the thing for which you are designed. You must not try to escape it, because it is necessary to your own soul. It is your debt of honor. It is the price of your own manhood. You cannot see your way now, but you will; I feel sure of it. I cannot tell you how nor when it

will be; I cannot give you the wisdom nor the strength you will need. There is one who can. Call on Him, Sam. He will not fail you. Come, I will go with you this first time."

Sam felt himself swept along by the earnestness and confidence of the forceful man who had done so much for him in the past. He hardly understood all that had been said, but he was overwhelmed with a sense of the strangeness and utter impossibility of the task which confronted him. Was a miracle to be wrought? Surely nothing less would make it possible for him to approach Bartley on such an errand, or for Bartley to listen to him if he should go. Yet had it been any less a miracle when Parson Allen had come to him and snatched him from ruin? Parson Allen was well-nigh resistless himself—or he transmitted a resistless force—and he never hesitated to attempt any task because of its difficulty. Did he imagine Sam could do what he himself had done? Surely not! Allen was a minister, while Sam was only—was only—what was he, after all, but a young man who had been a scoundrel, and who had been turned from his wrong doing, and forgiven, and who was trying now to be a good man? How was Allen any different from this? What was there to prevent Sam from doing what Allen had done? If Allen were simply a transmitter of power, why could not Sam also become a transmitter by getting in touch with the same source of power? But Bartley! The picture of his insolent, hateful face and the memory of his stinging taunts threw all other thoughts into confusion and brought back simply the one word "impossible" with more emphasis than before. Yet even as these questions and doubts flashed through his mind, scarcely formulated, but persistent, Sam found himself kneeling beside the strong muscular form of the lumber-jack preacher at the white-covered bed and listening to an outpouring

of petition that seemed, as it went on with an ever increasing passion of appeal, to assail the very gates of Heaven with compelling desire. If God's favor could be captured by storm, surely, thought Sam, such a prayer must be answered. His own spirit felt strengthened by its influence, but when his turn came after Allen had finished he hesitated for several moments in the stillness of the room. At last he prayed: "Dear Heavenly Father; if this thing is the work I must do —if it is the work Thou hast set for me, please show me how to do it, and give me the strength I need; and please make—please make—him willing. Amen." He could not bring himself to pronounce Bartley's name in his prayer. Somehow it seemed that to do so would be irreverent, and he hesitated a long time for some phrase as a substitute. In this interval the face of his enemy persisted in forcing itself before his mind's eye, and he heard again the shameful words of the previous day. He almost choked as he finished his prayer hurriedly and rose to his feet with the minister. He felt painfully oppressed, as if he had been asking for something he did not want and did not believe he could get. Nevertheless he took the hand Parson Allen held out to him, and as he winced under the mighty grip he said with perfect sincerity:

"You may be right, Mr. Allen; you almost always are; and I'll do the best I can to deserve your confidence, but you have no idea how this thing looks to me. I'm afraid it will take a miracle to make it possible. Bartley and I are as far apart as the poles."

"Come, Sam, it's too glorious a day to stay in the house. Let's get outside and breathe the sweet October air. Go find Lettie and bring her along. The dishes must be out of the way by now. If not we'll take hold and finish them for her. Come on!"

Just before supper that evening Sam strolled into

the kitchen and remarked as though with a sudden impulse, " Say, Lettie, is there any more of that pumpkin pie left? It was the most delicious pumpkin pie I ever tasted. I didn't know you were such an expert. I wish you could find me a piece for supper."

Lettie blushed and smiled with pleasure, as, going to her husband, she kissed him and said, " There's another whole one in the pantry. You may have it all if you like." Just then, through the open door, she spied the minister in the next room, and added quickly, " No, you can't, you pig; you can have only half. The other half you must give to Mr. Allen."

CHAPTER X

For more than three hours Tuesday morning after his return from Detroit, Bartley was closeted in his private office with a visitor who had come with him before seven o'clock. The door into the printing room was kept locked and none of the crew knew who was with the editor until Crawford, having called twice in vain for more copy, knocked a third time, peremptorily, on the door and declared that work was at a standstill for want of copy or proofs. Then Bartley came to the door with a small batch of manuscript, and the foreman caught sight of a tall, smooth-faced, sandy-haired young man standing at the window. When the door was closed again and Crawford returned to his frame he remarked in a tone of disappointment, "It's only Hank Farineau."

Henry Farineau, familiarly known as Hank, and often called Lank because of his long, lean, bony frame, was one of Bartley's particular intimates. He was a lawyer, sport, speculator, gambler, and keeper of a small watch and jewelry shop. The business transacted in the shop was insignificant, and, so far as the public could observe, Hank paid it small attention. Frequently he was called upon to defend in court some culprit who had fallen into the clutches of the law, or to conduct the case of some person who wished to defeat justice in a civil suit. Never was he called upon, knowingly, by one whose cause was right. He had money enough to spend and to bet, usually, although there were times when he seemed to be sailing close to the wind. Whenever noticeably "flush," he spoke nonchalantly of his "winnings," and few persons ever asked for more

specific information with regard to his source of income.

In nearly all of Bartley's schemes Farineau had some part. The thing they were planning this morning was one of the biggest enterprises they had undertaken for some time, and it was full of risk. Boldness, as well as cleverness, would be needed to steer clear of hidden rocks. They had been planning their course, and Farineau had been given an errand which called for promptness.

"See him this morning, if you can, and bluff him to a standstill," said Bartley. "If he finds it out himself, he may get suspicious and try to make us trouble. If we go to him of our own accord it will be taken as evidence that we had no knowledge of his intentions in the matter and simply have an eye to his capital. By George! What a joke! I'm half a mind to go myself, only we'd be sure to fight."

About ten o'clock Farineau came out of Bartley's office and walked hurriedly to the hall. At the door he met a gentleman who eyed him sharply and said, "I beg pardon; you are not Mr. W. H. Bartley?"

With a curt "no sir, I am not," Hank pushed past the stranger and disappeared down the stairs.

"Has Mr. Bartley returned?" inquired the newcomer of Crawford.

"He's here," replied the foreman. "What name shall I give him?"

The stranger took out a cardcase and pulled a card halfway from it, then changing his mind, pushed the card back, and said simply, "Mr. White, please."

When Bartley appeared in response to Crawford's message, the stranger again took out his card and handed it to the editor, saying, "May I have a few minutes' talk with you in private, sir?"

A quick look of suspicion flashed from Bartley's eyes

as he read the name and the words "U. S. Post Office Dept." on the card. He seemed about to refuse the request, pleading great pressure of work, but, suddenly, glancing up, he met the curious look of Nell Tompkins, Crawford, and the others of the crew. His manner at once became effusive. He threw open his office door and exclaimed: "I am very busy, of course, always am, you know; but I can find time for a few minutes' conversation. Come into my private office and make yourself comfortable. Now, sir, what can I do for you?"

"This account of the recent Post Office robbery—You wrote it, did you not?" inquired Mr. White, accepting, with a bow, the easy chair toward which Bartley waved him.

"Yes, sir; as Editor of *Chips*, I write most of the news as well as the editorial articles, and I am able to vouch for the facts in that story so far as they came to my knowledge."

"Exactly; pleased to hear it. The case has baffled us so far, and this article which was placed in my hands Saturday night seems to offer clues heretofore unrevealed. I desire to secure the more explicit information you evidently possess to help us in following up these clues."

"Glad to help you all I can, sir," declared Bartley, tipping back in his chair and thrusting both hands into his pockets, "but all I know is told right there in the paper."

"Not quite, I believe, if you will pardon me, sir. You say here that one of your leading citizens was on his way home about two o'clock Wednesday morning when he saw three men on Main Street who, in the light of subsequent revelations, are suspected to be the thieves. Will you kindly give me the name of the gentleman who gave you this information so that I may question him more minutely?"

"Well, I declare, you've got me there," replied Bartley with a laugh. "I talked with everybody in the crowd at the time the affair was first discovered, and some man told me his experience as I have stated it. I could not, for the life of me, tell now who the man is."

"But you say here, 'one of our leading citizens'"!

"Yes, I know; but that's just a newspaper euphemism, a sort of editorial license, you know. Whenever a man is mentioned in a news article he is spoken of as 'one of our leading citizens,' or 'a prominent resident,' or something like that, especially if it is impossible or inexpedient to give his name. It reads better and adds a tone of authority, you must admit. I'm awfully sorry I can't give you his name."

"H'm, so am I," said the Post Office detective. "Not much credence can be given to such anonymous information. The man may have made up the yarn for the sake of adding to the sensation."

"That is unlikely, my dear sir, for the simple reason that his description of the three men tallied closely with that afterward given by the night watchman."

"Ah, indeed, I was not aware that the night watchman had been so explicit. I shall have to talk with him again. Very well, sir, I will not detain you longer. I am sorry you did not make a point to identify so important a witness. It showed, if I must say it, a singular lack of alertness for a newspaper man, and a lamentable absence of interest in the public welfare for a citizen. Good day, sir."

The detective was plainly disappointed and did not try to conceal his irritation as he rose to go. Bartley refrained from making any retort. He opened his office door with an alacrity that suggested more than willingness to speed the parting guest, and as soon as Mr. White had disappeared into the hall, the editor of

Chips returned to his sanctum with a feeling of satisfaction and relief.

When Farineau left Bartley's office he hurried to Rounds's livery stable and got out his mare Dolly. He was hitching her to the buckboard when the sight of another rig coming down the road caused him to exclaim,

"By thunder! here he is now! Well, Dolly, you're dished out of a spin today. Hold on there, Hawkins, I want to speak to you."

Sam pulled up and looked at Farineau in surprise. He had no particular acquaintance with him, but knew something of his reputation and that he was a bosom friend of Bartley.

"I was just hitching up to drive out your way," said Farineau. "Lucky you happened along; I should have missed you. Can you drop around to my shop for a moment on a matter of business?"

"I'm afraid not this morning," replied Hawkins. "I have an engagement with Mr. Brinton and must hurry. Can't you tell me what the business is right here?"

"No; it's too important. I won't keep you long. You wouldn't wish to miss hearing what I have to say, but we must be alone."

With much reluctance and some misgivings, Sam went with Farineau to his little jewelry store and followed him into the small back room.

"Have a smoke," said Hank, producing a box of black-looking cigars.

"No, thank you, not just now; I must hurry along. What is this important business?"

For a moment Hank regarded the young man from Red-Keg with an uncertain look as though debating just how to approach the business in hand.

"You and Bart are not very good friends, are you?" he said, at length.

Sam started. What in the world was the man coming to? Was the miracle he had referred to in talking with Parson Allen going to take place? He was at a loss for a reply and waited for something more explicit.

"I heard of your little unpleasantness Saturday up at The Keg. Bart is too free with his tongue—and with his pen, too. I was in his office this morning and he showed me the proof of an item about you that Brinton objected to last week and that really ought to be suppressed. He said he intended to print it in this week's number of *Chips*. I tried to persuade him to cut it out altogether, but he is so stubborn there's not much use in opposing him. Why can't you and he be friends? It would be ever so much better for both of you."

"I have never done anything to Bartley to rouse his enmity," he said. "It is altogether gratuitous on his part, and he seems to enjoy showing it."

Farineau leaned forward and spoke in a confidential tone. "I can tell you a way to put a stop to his enmity —indeed you may even gain his friendship and at the same time do a very good stroke of business for yourself."

Again a thought of his conversation with Parson Allen flashed into Sam's mind, but coupled with it was an uncontrollable feeling of distrust and repulsion. He longed to cut short the interview with this man and get away. He had never heard of anything but trickery and deceit in Farineau's dealings, and he knew him to be hand in glove with Bartley. Yet he had consented to come out of his way to listen. Now it would be foolish to run away without hearing what he had to say. Rather ungraciously, however, he said, "What is the scheme? I'm not likely to buy him off, if that's what you mean."

"Oh, no; it isn't like that at all. In fact, Bartley is willing to do you a valuable favor if you'll let him. He

offers, at my suggestion, to let you in on the ground floor in the greatest money-making enterprise ever launched in this country—a perfectly legitimate, high class business enterprise, of course," he added, as he saw refusal in Sam's face. "Some of the best people in town will be in the thing. You better not decide against it until you know what it is."

"I am not looking for any such opportunity," said Hawkins shortly.

"Perhaps not just now, but you will be, doubtless, when you realize on your lumber, and you can't find anything equal to this. It would be the making of Midland, and those connected with the enterprise will quickly become the big men of the town."

"It doesn't interest me, Mr. Farineau, whatever it is, and regardless of the persons who are promoting it. I have plans of my own, and I do not care to consider any proposition to invest in one of—in other people's enterprises. I can't, for the life of me, see why Bartley should send you to me, after what has happened." He rose to his feet, to intimate that nothing further need be said, and that he was anxious to go.

"Wait a minute, Hawkins; you might at least hear what the scheme is. You may change your mind. Bartley has made a wonderful discovery in this neighborhood, and has secured the valuable tract of land where the treasure was found. He proposes to form a company and begin work at once." Sam resumed his seat with a sudden feeling of faintness and a premonition of something evil impending. "And he offers you an interest in the business," continued Farineau, "for a sum that is merely nominal when the certainty of large profits is considered."

"What is it he has discovered?" asked Sam, interested only in one thought.

"Salt."

Hawkins caught his breath and glared at the man before him.

"Where is the property?" he demanded.

"You know the old Hammond farm? That's the place; almost within the village limits."

Sam sprang to his feet, clenching his teeth to keep back the oath which seemed bursting from him; his face was livid with rage. "I don't believe it," he cried; "that's *my* property, or as much as mine; I have an option on it. How could Bartley get hold of it? *I* found the salt myself, and at the present moment I'm waiting to hear from the owners concerning the purchase. There's some trick in this."

"Humph! I guess not. You were too slow; that's all. I suppose Bart found that salt, too. It ain't locked up in anybody's private safe, is it? Likely enough while you were thinking about it, and waiting for letters, he was on the move. Bart doesn't let much grass grow under his feet when he makes up his mind to a thing. Anyhow, he has bought the property, all right, and has the papers, signed and delivered; I saw them myself. The only question now is, do you want to go in on the thing? If this is the business you were planning, there's all the more reason for coming into the company now that you can't buy the property outright."

"I certainly will *not* come in; he knows that perfectly well; he merely wants to insult me again. I shall take immediate steps to find out what hook and crook Bartley resorted to to get hold of the property—if he really has it as you say."

"Oh, there isn't any question of that, and there wasn't any need for hook nor crook. The place was on the market for sale, and has been for some time. First come first served, you know. I would advise you, however, to think well before you turn down Bartley's offer. He is a

bad man to offend, and it may be worth your while to disarm his enmity, even if you do not care for his friendship. I happen to have a proof of the article he intended to put in this week's *Chips* about you. I stole it from his desk when his back was turned. It's a pretty mean slap, and if I were in your position, I should want to suppress it if I could. Just run your eye over this proof. You know he wouldn't be at all likely to print such stuff about a member of his Salt Company."

Sam took the slip which Farineau gave him, and glanced through the article. His hands trembled, and he choked with the tumult of his passion, and the angry words which could hardly be kept down. As he finished reading the insolent, brutal attack which had roused Mr. Brinton's anger the week before, he crushed the paper and threw it into the face of the man who had brought it. "Take that back to the contemptible hound who sent you here to blackmail me, and let me out of this place this instant before I lose control of myself entirely!" He pushed Farineau aside and fairly ran out of the little back room, through the tiny shop and into the street, where his horse was waiting. Springing into the buckboard, he caught up the reins and, giving the horse a cut with the whip that made the poor animal leap forward with pain and surprise, he dashed away up the road regardless of the direction taken. Not until he found himself almost half-way back to Red-Keg did he remember his engagement with Brinton and turn his horse again toward Midland.

So this was the outcome of all his plannings and efforts; this was the reward for his ambition to become a respected business man in Midland; this was the encouragement he received to remain among those who knew him for what he had been and for what he now professed to be—to remain among them and make a career which would cause them to forget old trespasses.

What was left for him now? Nothing but the devilish attacks of this human hyena, who revelled in digging up the carrion from old graves; nothing but the continual reminder of past misdeeds, hurled in his face with a brutal delight in repetition and publicity. Oh, the shame and the torture of it all! This man Bartley, indeed! This was the man Parson Allen wanted him to befriend and try to save! A man who was bent on ruining him; who had, as he believed, snatched away from him by some trickery the property on which he had been building his hopes for the future; a man who, not content with stealing the prize from his outstretched fingers, sent one of his tools to add insult to injury with such an offer coupled with such a threat as had come to him that morning. Surely, even Parson Allen must admit that all idea of approach on Sam's part and reception on Bartley's part was now utterly out of the question. Yet even as the conclusion formed itself in his mind, Sam found his inner convictions combating it. Robert Allen had passed through experiences which would lead him to dispute the conclusion Sam had just reached. Moreover, Allen had told these experiences at a time of great travail of soul for the younger man, and these experiences, his own as well as Allen's, all pointed to the path across which Sam now sought to place the bar of impossibility. Yet in spite of these inner convictions the present seemed still impenetrably dark, hopeless, and distracting, and the storm still raged as the young man rubbed down and blanketed his steaming horse in Brinton's stable an hour before dinner time.

CHAPTER XI

Throughout Midland County Jesse Brinton was known and loved for his quiet, kindly manner, his genial friendliness toward young and old, and his quick, generous sympathy and helpfulness for all in trouble and need; yet there was a plentiful supply of the Old Adam in his nature. Temper and combativeness were not lacking in his makeup; they were simply kept under control. He had listened with carefully concealed indignation while Sam told of his interview with Farineau. For the sake of his friend Allen's cherished plan, he would not let the young man know how heartily he sympathized with him in his detestation of Bartley, nor how thoroughly he would relish bringing the fellow to book. He could not go quite as far as the intense and enthusiastic backwoods minister in urging heroic efforts for the redemption of such a rascal. His own experience had not been so tragic as Allen's, and had not taught him quite the same lesson about saving "to the uttermost"; but he certainly would not do anything, nor say anything to chill the good man's ardor, and if his ardor and conviction could be communicated to his younger brother, God forbid that he should hinder. Yet the practical side of the affair called him to immediate action, if anything could be done; and such action was the only relief he allowed himself for feelings which must not be expressed. The first thing that occurred to his mind was to send a telegraphic inquiry to Dominie & Son, to make sure that the property had been actually sold to Bartley. It seemed barely possible that Bartley,

learning in some way of Sam's discovery, had tried to forestall him by making him believe that the purchase had been comsummated. When, in the course of an hour, the reply came confirming the bad news, Brinton puzzled his head in vain for some other move to make. At the same time he endeavored to make the affair appear less serious and disturbing to Sam. He reminded the young man that it was entirely possible for Bartley, or anyone else, to have discovered the salt in the same way he had done, and that Bartley might have as good a claim to it as Sam had. But Brinton's heart was not in his argument, and, though entirely plausible it did not convince nor satisfy the disappointed youth, especially since nothing could be said to palliate the brutal attack on Sam which Bartley had prepared for *Chips*.

"Dominie & Son had no right to sell without notifying me, after giving me an option. I certainly shall contest the sale and have it set aside," declared Hawkins, with vehemence.

"Questions of right do not bother Dominie & Son very much," replied Brinton. "They would never let go a bird in hand simply because it might be more honorable to wait for the bird in the bush. You must not forget, however, that both Bartley and Dominie & Son would be unscrupulous and dangerous opponents in a law suit. Such a contest is not to be rushed into hastily. Think it over, and in the meantime perhaps you can find something you will like still better. The salt business isn't the only profitable industry which could be established here. Now, my dear fellow, try to be yourself at dinner. Ned is coming down from the office. He ought to be here now. The poor boy is growing too silent and morose. He doesn't get out among the young people enough and sticks in the office early and late. He needs livening up, and more open air. When I move out to

the farm in the Spring I'm going to make him go with me."

Mr. Brinton was an enthusiastic lover of the country, and it had been his ambition for many years to own and operate a farm. He had been deterred by the objections and doubts of his wife, a sweet-mannered, delicate woman, unable herself to assume the burden of farm housekeeping and fearful that her husband would find the reality of farming so different from his long-cherished conceptions that he would be unable to succeed. As the years advanced, and grey hairs accumulated rapidly, and there was no abatement in Jesse Brinton's yearning for farm life, his faithful helpmeet began to feel that it was wrong to hold him back, unsatisfied, from his dearest wish. Gently she yielded, with one condition that competent help for farm and household be secured in advance; so now, at fifty-five, the Editor of *The Pioneer* was preparing with the enthusiasm of a boy to realize his life-long hopes. Some six years earlier, his friend and neighbor in Midland, Josiah Hawkins, had retired to his quarter section farm beyond Red-Keg, and Brinton, with envious eyes, had watched him go. Many times the editor had visited Farmer Hawkins and tramped through the woods and over the fields with him, planning what some day he himself would do when he had his way. But Josiah Hawkins had given up his Midland business entirely and devoted all his attention to his farm, whereas Brinton had no thought of disposing of *The Pioneer* in order to become a farmer. He had bought the best farm he could find within easy driving distance of the village and intended to content himself for the present with directing the work and enjoying the results, leaving the actual labor to hired help.

"It is too bad," he told Sam as they discussed the subject at dinner, "that the Hawkins farm is so far from

Midland. I should like to have bought that because of the associations, but Oakdale is as far as I dare to go beyond the village, and I'll guarantee that my grove of oaks will equal Josiah's favorites."

"Have you found your farmer yet?" asked Sam, feeling that courtesy required him to show an interest in his host's plans, even if his own mind were filled with other thoughts.

"No, but I may make a farmer of Ned," said Brinton with a laugh. "I believe it would suit him better than newspaper publishing."

A smile glimmered for an instant on Ned's face, as he replied, "I haven't had much experience in that line, but I'm willing to go to work at Oakdale if you say so."

"Not quite yet, Ned; *The Pioneer* needs you at present. Printers are scarcer than farmers around here, and it wouldn't pay to spoil a good man at one trade to make a poor one at another."

"John Carroll wants the place, and I shouldn't wonder if he is just the man you want," said Sam. "He likes the work a great deal better than logging, and is very fond of animals, and he would like to bring his sister on from Pennsylvania to do the housework."

"The very thing!" exclaimed Brinton. "What do you think of that, mother? You were wondering where you could get a housekeeper; now here is one ready and waiting for you."

"Has she had any experience in such work? Does she want to come? Has the brother consulted her about it? How old is she? How do we know——?"

"Hold on, mother! Dear me! you are reeling off questions like a house afire. You don't suppose Sam can give you the whole family history offhand, do you?" exclaimed Brinton laughing. "Tell us what you know about the young woman, Sam, and we'll have to wait for the rest."

"Well, her brother John declared she can do everything; that she is a good cook, laundress, dressmaker, and what-not; that she is sweet-tempered; and I believe he said as pretty as a picture in the bargain; but of course, he's her brother."

"There you have it, mother—the gospel according to John."

"Jesse! don't be sacrilegious."

Mr. Brinton winked at the two young men with so droll a look that even Sam allowed a smile to break through the gloom for an instant. "As for you, young man," Brinton remarked to Ned, "I told Sam before dinner that I am going to ask you (I said 'make you' to Sam) to go out to Oakdale with me to live for awhile. It will do you good, and I shall want company on the drive back and forth every day. How does it strike you?"

Ned's face fairly beamed with surprise and pleasure. "I should like it immensely, Mr. Brinton. It would be delightful; you are very kind, I'm sure. I've always thought I should enjoy living on a farm. In fact, I came near hiring out as a farm hand before I came here after leaving Detroit."

Ned stopped abruptly, and his face flushed for no apparent reason. He seldom spoke of his life before coming to Midland, and something brought to mind by his own words was evidently making him uncomfortable. He began to speak of some commonplace matter, but Brinton interrupted him.

"That reminds me, Ned, I had a flying visit from an old friend of yours from Detroit on Sunday. I meant to tell you before. If I had known where to find you I would have sent for you to come out and meet him."

The flush faded from Ned's cheeks leaving them strangely white. His hand trembled, and a knife dropped to the table.

"Who was it?" he asked, in a strained voice.

"Why, your former chief, Mr. Winslow, editor of the Detroit *Express*. He was on his way home from the West and ran up to renew an acquaintance of many years ago. He said you used to work on his paper."

A look of dread had come into Ned's eyes; he seemed to be waiting in suspense for something more. Brinton could not help noticing his agitation, and even Sam eyed him curiously.

"What in the world is the matter with you, Ned?" asked Mr. Brinton. "You look frightened."

"No, no, it isn't anything; I just had a queer feeling, that's all," replied Ned, with an evident effort to control himself. "What did Mr. Winslow have to say? I mean," he added hastily, "how is he? Of course I don't want you to repeat conversations. It has been so long since I saw him that probably he doesn't remember me. How did he know I was here? He is a fine man, and a wide-awake editor, and his staff thought the world of him. What brings him out this way? Or probably he didn't say. Oh, yes, you told me. He never used to take much vacation; perhaps he has been making up for lost time. It doesn't pay to work too steadily. I hope you will take more rest, Mr. Brinton, when you get out on your farm. I can look after things a little more than——"

"Come, come, Ned; do you know what you are talking about? I don't believe you do. You ask questions and then try to shut me off from answering them. I do believe you are afraid of Mr. Winslow. Why, he spoke very highly of you and said he was sorry to have you leave him. I'm not going to repeat all he said, because it might embarrass you; but I am sure he is your friend."

Ned managed to say that he was grateful for Mr. Winslow's kindness; but as he said it his voice was

unsteady, and the look he turned upon Mr. Brinton seemed full of a question that he dared not utter. During the remainder of the meal, he said little, and he left the table as soon as he could. Really, he was more disturbed than he cared to own. What had Mr. Winslow told Brinton? he kept asking himself. Had he told him anything? Oh, if only he could know! What would Mr. Brinton think of it, if Winslow had told him? He felt his face burning at the thought of having such a thing known in Midland. He hurried back to the office, and within fifteen minutes came out again and walked quickly to the Post Office where he deposited a letter addressed to "Mr. H. B. Winslow, Editor of *The Express*, Detroit, Mich." Returning at once to *The Pioneer*, he met Nell Tompkins in the hall coming from *Chips* office.

"Please look here a minute, Mr. Jewel. I want you to read this," she exclaimed.

Thinking she had repented and was about to show him the letter he had seen in her possession at the time of the fire, he stopped quickly. The girl held out a proof slip.

"Here's a horrid thing Bartley gave me to set up for this week's paper. I had to do it, or he'd suspect something, but you needn't think it's going in. I shalln't let it."

Ned took the proof and read:

"Another rising citizen upon whom the public will do well to keep its eyes is Edward Jewel, at present posing as a humble but honest printer in the employ of His Holiness, J. Brinton. For personal or business reasons, young Jewel always appears in public with a touch-me-not dignity, and a sanctimonious expression of countenance which doubtless are accepted as the hallmark of a noble character by his employer. We have heard it remarked as passing strange that in all the time since he introduced himself to this unsuspecting community nothing has been vouchsafed as to his previous occupation or connections. During the past few weeks we have heard several highly interesting rumors concerning his earlier career. Possibly, if called upon, he will consent to shed

some light on certain affairs that would make lively reading. Mr. Jewel has the floor. We shall not deprive him of the privilege unless he declines to avail himself of it. In the meantime, as we said before, our readers will do well to keep their eyes on this rising young citizen. He will bear watching; and a little investigation might do no harm to the cause of righteousness which he and his employer pretend to uphold."

The effect on Ned of this strange attack was startling. All the agitation he had shown at Mr. Brinton's house returned with greater intensity. His hand holding the paper shook violently, and for a moment he could not command his voice to speak. Nell watched him with surprise. At length he stammered,

"This—this is infamous! What has Bartley against me? What have I ever done to him to bring such an attack? He lies if he means to insinuate that there is anything dishonorable in my past life!"

"He thinks you set fire to his office," said Nell. "He says he knows you did, and that he knows why. He wants to get square, I suppose."

"It's a lie! You know I didn't set the fire. He only pretends to think I did it."

"I know you didn't do it, and I've told Bartley so over and over again," said Nell; "but he seems to want to believe you did. He has some grudge against you,—I can't imagine what, but I'm not going to let him print this stuff, that's positive." The girl stamped her foot to lend emphasis to her words, and her eyes snapped. She looked fully able to have her way.

"How can you prevent it if he's determined to print it?" asked Ned, showing more interest than he had ever done before in Nell's statements.

"I'll find some way, all right. I'll wait this week until making up the paper; then I'll drop this type and pi it. Making up is always late and there won't be time to reset the stuff. We'll run in something else. Perhaps Bart will never miss it. If he does, and persists in put-

ting it in next week, I'll tell him I'll throw up my job on *Chips*. You don't have a very good opinion of me, Mr. Jewel, I know you don't, but I'm going to show you that I'm not so bad as you think I am, and that I'm your friend."

Ned looked into the girl's face, brightened as it was with the excitement of the moment, and he thought what a puzzling, contradictory, disconcerting problem she was. He thanked her and asked if any of the others had seen the article. When she assured him that no one else had seen it, and no one else should ever see it, he thanked her again and hurried into his own office, his mind filled with a tumult of distressing thoughts and questionings.

The weeks went by and the article did not appear in *Chips*. In some way or other Nell had made good her promise, and he could not help treating her in a more friendly manner thereafter. He had received a letter from Detroit which seemed to set him at ease; and he had accounted to Mr. Brinton for his agitation by saying that he had owed Mr. Winslow money at one time, and that he did not want the circumstances known in Midland for private reasons. He assured his employer very earnestly that there was nothing in the affair which involved his honesty or honor, and Mr. Brinton, remembering the hearty praise bestowed by Mr. Winslow, was quite ready to believe the young man.

CHAPTER XII

Not even the mysterious robbery of the Post Office and the failure of the detectives to get any trace of the thieves had so thoroughly stirred the people of Midland as had the public horsewhipping of W. H. Bartley, editor and publisher of *Chips*. This, with the events which immediately proceeded and followed it, had supplied more sensational news than even Bartley himself cared to do justice to in his paper the following week.

Jim Bradshaw had watched for the paper after giving the editor his warning, and had pounced upon the first copy which reached Red-Keg on Friday morning. He took it home unopened and read it there alone. No record, therefore, could be made of his comments when he found the thing he had forbidden and realized that it was even more offensive than he had reason to expect; but there was a dangerous look in his eyes as he came out of his house. He straightway hunted for Sam Hawkins and found him at the banking ground on the Tittabawassee. With scant ceremony he interrupted a conference between Hawkins and Arthur Renwick, the foreman of the Tittabawassee Boom Company.

"If ye can spare the time, Mr. Hawkins, I'd like a word with ye."

"Certainly, Jim," and Sam, excusing himself to Renwick, followed the big sawyer who had immediately started to return to the village. When Sam caught up with him he stopped and pulled out a copy of *Chips*.

"Read that," he said.

Sam glanced through the trumped-up account of the

supposed elopement of Bradshaw's wife and the cruel comments running through the article.

"It's an outrage! He seems to have made it as brutal as he could," declared the young man, handing back the paper.

"I'll attend to him—now read that."

Jim had quickly turned the paper inside out and pointed to another item. Sam recognized it at once as the venomous attack upon himself which Farineau had shown him a few days before. He flushed angrily as he handed the paper back to Bradshaw and said, "I saw that before it was printed. Bartley sent it to me by his tool Farineau and tried to blackmail me with it."

"You come with me, Sam Hawkins. This here about you is none o' my business, but you're a friend o' mine, an' I'll stand by ye. We'll attend to him together. All I ask is that ye keep off till I'm through. Come along; he's spilin' for his medicine."

"What are you going to do, Jim?"

"Never ye worry over that, my boy. I'll know when to stop. What I'm goin' ter do is commanded of me in Holy Writ. I've got it right here," and Bradshaw pulled out of his pocket a small leather-covered Bible. "I'll read the prescription to him before I give him the medicine, so he'll know it's right." They had arrived at the place where Bradshaw's buckboard was standing. "Jump in; I'll have ye back before sundown."

Sam obeyed, wondering. Indeed, Bradshaw left him no time for questioning or deliberation. Before he realized that in all probability he was being made party to an attack upon Bartley, they were spinning away toward Midland.

Bradshaw had chosen a bad day for finding Bartley at his office. The paper was printed and distributed on Thursday. Friday was an off day for the editor. While

his office crew distributed type in the cases, he attended to other business outside. By the exercise of his peculiar talents, and with the valuable aid of Hank Farineau, he had already secured several stockholders for his new Salt Company. Ben Chabington, senior, proprietor of the Midland Hotel, had taken a large interest in the concern and was to share with Bartley in the exploitation and management. Peter Hale, the gunsmith, a fairly well-to-do citizen, had been persuaded to invest a part of his savings; and three or four others had yielded to the blandishments of the promoters, coupled with the hope of large profits. The most important quarry captured by Bartley, Farineau, and Chabington was the wide-awake speculator and real estate operator, Stern, who, after listening to the plans, and taking a trip out to the property, agreed to make a loan of a thousand dollars toward the working capital, taking a first mortage as security. With such a start, Bartley felt that his enterprise was well launched and that it would be easy to increase his list of stockholders as soon as the work was under way.

This Friday on which Bradshaw had set off from Red-Keg with Sam Hawkins to call on Bartley, the editor-promoter was out on business connected with his new enterprise. Bradshaw was somewhat cast down at first when the foreman at *Chips* office told him that Bartley was gone for the day and that it was impossible to tell where he could be found. For a moment only did the big lumberman give way to his disappointment; then he brought his jaws together hard and declared to Sam that such a skunk could not hide very long—his smell would betray him—and that he would track him until he found him. As he drove down Main Street Bradshaw caught sight of his friend Jake Vogel coming out of the Post Office. Handing the lines to Sam, Jim sprang to the ground and held a hurried conversation in

a low tone with Jake which gave the latter no little satisfaction, as evidenced by his grins and nods of approval. Then the lumber-jack stepped back into the buckboard and said to Sam:

"Jake thinks we'll find our man in Chab's hotel. He saw him an' Farineau go in there half an hour ago."

Sam was beginning to feel decidedly uneasy. Several emotions contended within him. Rage against Bartley for the cruel and unprovoked attack upon him in *Chips*, and for snatching from him the property which he had counted as his own; the sense of wanton injury, and of obstacles thrown maliciously in his path when he was honestly trying to walk in the way of virtue and to hold up his head among men; curiosity to see what Bradshaw would do when he found Bartley; eagerness for some adequate punishment to be meted out to him who took such delight in hurting others; a sneaking satisfaction that the powerful arm of the lumber-jack beside him was likely to be the instrument of punishment, and that he himself could see this punishment without being personally responsible for it—all these things held him to await the issue of the meeting between Bradshaw and Bartley. But other thoughts kept intruding themselves and made him uncomfortable. The forceful arguments of Parson Allen had taken hold of him and would not let go. The deep, impassioned tones of the backwoods minister rang in his ears and seemed to set his whole body quivering—"God will deliver your enemy into your hands. I shall watch and pray for it. It is your destiny—necessary to your own soul—debt of honor—price of your own manhood——" The words repeated themselves over and over in his thoughts although he tried to get away from them. Was this the way God would deliver his enemy to him? Was this what Allen was watching and praying for? A vivid picture floated through Sam's mind: The muscular lum-

ber-jack preacher was kneeling on a bed of moss in the forest; his iron-grey hair was pushed back from a broad forehead furrowed with pain and intense earnestness; his eyes were closed but turned upward to the patch of blue sky glimmering through the pine trees; a look of passionate desire, of almost imperative demand convulsed his features; and the great brawny fingers, clasped tightly together, seemed to be saying, "'I will not let thee go, except thou bless me'—and this needy young brother by my side." Then the picture changed and the same strong, earnest man was kneeling by a white-covered bed and pouring out a different petition, but for the same younger brother; and the younger brother had echoed the appeal for himself. Sam looked intently at objects around him, striving almost unconsciously to replace the disturbing mind pictures with commonplace things, but the visions returned. Perhaps Parson Allen even now was kneeling somewhere and appealing to Heaven for the same cause. And here was he, on an errand of revenge! Here was he, antagonizing the wishes of his best friend, undoing the beginning he had himself made when he had prayed for strength and wisdom for his task, and that God would make "him" willing. Now he himself was making his task more truly impossible—both for himself and for Bartley. He was moving straight in defiance of what Allen had called his destiny—and perhaps Allen was somewhere kneeling——

"Mr. Bradshaw, I'll trouble you to pull up a minute, please. I don't think I'll go with you any farther."

"What! not see the thing out! Ye're not afraid, are ye?" Bradshaw, in his surprise, could not suppress a slight scornful emphasis on the word "afraid," but he pulled in his horse as he spoke.

"No, I'm not afraid, certainly not; but I've thought of something, and I don't believe I'd better be with you

when you meet Bartley—if you are determined to meet him."

"Determined! Ye kin jest bet I am! but, I see; ye're thinking he may print some more o' that stuff about ye in *Chips* if ye jine me in this affair. Wall, I won't urge ye."

"No, Bradshaw, you're wrong again; it isn't that at all. I couldn't help thinking that I—I'm not quite the right fellow to throw stones at Bartley; I—oh, can't you see what I mean, Jim?"

The burly lumber-jack looked at Sam in silence a moment, then slowly extended his hand. "Good bye, Mr. Hawkins; I ain't quite sure; but I guess I know what ye're thinkin' about. If that's the way ye feel I won't try to hold ye. I'll 'tend to this job alone." In another moment he had tightened the lines and was off down the road to Chabington's hotel.

Sam stood still for a moment in the road watching the retreating buckboard. All at once a feeling as of a chance slipping from him caused him to start forward. Surely it would do no harm merely to look on while Bartley got his well deserved punishment. He wouldn't be responsible for it; but it would be a satisfaction to see the wretch called to account. Sam ran after the buckboard. He even called out "Jim!", but the man did not hear, and the buckboard was going too fast to catch. The young man stopped before he had run thirty yards. Slowly he turned his steps in the opposite direction, and walked away in the direction of Red-Keg, expecting Bradshaw to overtake him on the way home.

The Midland Hotel was a two-story frame structure, wholly unpretentious in appearance and accommodations; but it measured up to the requirements of those who used it, and, with the bar attachment, or with the bar to which the hotel was an attachment, Chabington

managed to accumulate considerable dividends. Some of these he had agreed to invest with Bartley in developing the salt which the latter boasted having discovered on the Hammond property. Chabington, Bartley, and Farineau were in close consultation in the little office of the hotel when Bradshaw strode in upon them. The editor of *Chips* was quick to recognize the intruder and to apprehend the purpose of his coming. He determined at once to carry the thing off by pure bluff and bravado, but congratulated himself upon having his two associates at his side in case of emergency.

"Ah, Bradshaw, glad to see you. Just come down from the Keg? Don't often see you down this way. Well we had quite a little rough and tumble up there the other day, didn't we? Guess you'll grant that, man for man, I did fairly well, eh? No hard feelings left, I hope; none on my side as far as you are concerned. Some little scores to settle with one or two of Hawkins's gang, but you and I can cry 'quits.' Now, I hope you'll excuse me, I'm very busy on a matter of special importance. See you again when I'm up your way—er—let me see, Chab, you were saying—"

"Ye needn't turn away so quick, Bill Bartley," said Bradshaw with more self-control than he supposed he could command; "ye've said your say, but I hain't said mine. How's it come ye printed this here, after I warned ye?" He held up a copy of *Chips*.

"Come, now, Bradshaw, we won't go into all that again, I haven't time now, and we discussed it to a finish the other day. I'll bid you good-day."

"But I ain't quite ready to bid you good-day. I drove down here a-purpose to see ye, an' I'm too busy to pay much heed to them kind o' bluffs. Jest ye listen to me a bit: I warned ye not to print that mess o' lies about me an' mine, an' I don't give warnin's for nothin'. This time I'm goin' to treat the matter accordin' to

Holy Writ, an' I'll ask ye to step down to the Post Office where I'll read ye the lesson to fit the case from the Bible in the presence o' witnesses."

Bartley and his friends stared at the lumber-jack as though he had taken leave of his senses. Then all three broke into a loud laugh. Chabington, who was inclined to obesity, completely lost control of himself and laughed until he was compelled to hold his sides with pain. Farineau was the first to speak.

"The poor man's bereavement has turned his brain, and he has sought the comfort of religion."

"By Jove, what a lark!" cried Bartley; "what a capital yarn it will make for *Chips!* The grass-widower reading a psalm to the wicked editor on the steps of the Post Office! That's too good to miss; we'll go by all means—that is, if the poor man hasn't changed his mind. How is it, Rev. Mr. Bradshaw; will the service be held promptly if we go now?"

Bradshaw had stood in grim silence while Bartley and the others indulged in their merriment. In reply to the editor's question he said shortly, "The exercises will take place 'cordin' to schedule, all right; an' if ye want the hull program, ye kin do the singin' while I do the preachin'."

In a few minutes the party had started for the Post Office, the lumber-jack in his buckboard, silent, inscrutable, the three unregenerates who expected to form the congregation, walking arm in arm on the sidewalk laughing and talking noisily. At the Post Office the latter were surprised to find a crowd gathered of a hundred or more men, women, and children. Prominent among them were Jake Vogel and half a dozen big fellows from the mill. Bartley scowled and stopped short, suspecting a trick, but failing to observe any signs of hostility, and unwilling to show the white feather, he smiled again and went on. Bradshaw leaped from his

buckboard with the small leather-covered Bible in his hand.

"This here Good Book," he cried, holding up the Bible for all to see, "we are told by the preachers to take as a guide for all our actions here below. Some of us don't do it, for instance that man standin' there who prints that dirty, lyin', persecutin' sheet called *Chips*. His hand is against every decent man an' woman, an' every decent hand is, or orter be, against him. He don't take this Book for his guide in publishin' that putrid paper, an' this week he printed a lot of lyin' stuff about me an' mine, as he has done so often about many of ye here. I warned him when he was up to the Keg, an' I came down here an' warned him again. That must be scriptural—though I couldn't put my finger on the verse—not to take no unfair advantage of your enemy, but give him fair warnin'. He paid no attention, but went on an' did his mischief. Now I'm goin' to do my part, 'cordin' to Scripture."

Bradshaw slipped the Bible into his pocket and looked at his enemy, who stood amused, suspicious, but at a loss to know what was to come next. Near him stood Chabington and Farineau. Bradshaw had learned a lesson of Bartley's lightning quickness of attack and wished to avoid putting him on the offensive. He slipped both hands into his trousers pockets and strolled up close to Bartley with an attitude as if he intended to say something more. Suddenly he pulled his hands from his pockets and clasped his big, brawny arms around Bartley pinioning his arms to his sides. The small man struggled wholly in vain. Before he realized what was happening Bradshaw had bound him with a clothes line which had mysteriously appeared at the very instant Bartley was seized. Chabington and Farineau, meanwhile, found themselves, much to their surprise, held prisoners by several strapping mill hands who had

been standing immediately behind them. No one interfered with Bradshaw. The crowd seemed wholly in sympathy with the proceedings.

"Now, Mr. Bill Bartley," said Bradshaw, when the tying was completed, "I'll read ye from Holy Writ, as I promised to do, the course o' treatment laid out an' prescribed for sech as you."

He opened the little Bible and found a place that was marked with a slip of paper. Putting his finger at a certain verse, he read:

"'A whip for the horse, a bridle for the ass, and a rod for the fool's back.'"

"That's the prescription for the medicine thet fits ye, Bart; an' I'm goin' to give ye the dose as it says here, an' much good may it do ye."

Some of the crowd laughed as Bradshaw read the verse he had chosen; but most were too much agog with curiosity, or too fully alive to the grim reality of the medicine Bartley was to receive, to laugh. The victim himself was purple with rage and strained fiercely at his bonds. Then finding he could not budge them, he began to curse so dreadfully that some of the women hurried away with their children. Bradshaw lost no time. He fetched from under the seat of his buckboard an old bridle in one hand and brought his horsewhip in the other.

"This here prescription says 'a bridle for the ass,' which you certainly are, so we'll try to 'tend to thet part. This piece o' harness was made to fit a higher class animal than you be—ye can't expect it'll set jest right; but we got to hang it on somehow." It was no easy matter. Bartley squirmed and dodged to escape the humiliating treatment, but the lumber-jack was persistent and muscular. Watching a moment when

Bartley opened his mouth to swear, Bradshaw forced the bit between his teeth and threw the headstall behind his head, catching the straps together enough to prevent them from falling off.

"'And a rod for the fool's back'" he repeated as he strode back and viewed the literally bridled but figuratively unbridled editor. "That certainly means you; an' a rod an' a whip is near enough the same thing, 'cordin' to my bringin' up, to satisfy the demands of Holy Writ, so here goes."

Without any restraining feelings of mercy the muscular sawyer and aggrieved husband plied the whip about the legs and back of the offender, putting more vigor into his strokes than he would think right to do if his horse were receiving them. Bartley yelled out his oaths and swore fearful vengeance, but not until he had given him a good round dozen blows did Bradshaw desist and free the impenitent victim.

"Now, Mr. Editor, go back to your dirty paper if ye will, an' write up a full account of these here 'religious services' as ye called 'em, but don't never print lies about me nor mine again."

Bartley wrenched himself free as soon as he felt the rope untied.

"You'll never leave this town alive, you ——!" he yelled snatching a revolver from his pocket and firing at Bradshaw, but his arm was knocked violently upward, and the bullet flew harmlessly over Bradshaw's head, while the revolver itself was quickly secured by Jake Vogel. Jim Bradshaw jumped into his buckboard and disappeared up the road toward Red-Keg heedless of the furious threats that were hurled after him by the man he had so relentlessly punished.

CHAPTER XIII

THE very next day the big sheriff, Joe Reon hunted up Bradshaw at Red-Keg and arrested him on a warrant sworn out by Bartley charging him with felonious assault. The sawyer submitted unresistingly, but when arraigned before Justice Rogers he pleaded not guilty, and therefore was held under nominal bail for trial in the Circuit Court the following week. The trial was short and exciting. No such crowd had gathered at any trial in many years. Prosecuting Attorney Hemingway, a portly old gentleman, learned, but good-natured and facetious, presented several witnesses and made each of them describe in detail the whipping of Bartley in front of the Post Office. What one forgot another supplied, until the crowd which packed the court room had been regaled with the full story. The witnesses seemed to enjoy telling of the affair as much as the listeners enjoyed hearing of it. The attorney for the defense, Van Kleeck, a sharp-witted, jolly little man, lame in one leg, conducted the cross examination in a somewhat unusual manner. His questions were all directed toward bringing out additional details as to Bradshaw's reasons for the assault, his use of the Bible as authority, and Bartley's language and behavior during and after his whipping.

"Did you hear the defendant read a verse from the Bible as justification for what he did?" Van Kleeck asked one witness.

"Yes, sir; the verse said to use a whip on a horse, a bridle on an ass, and a rod on a fool," replied the witness grinning.

"Well, then, why did he put a bridle on Mr. Bartley?"

"Because he is an ass, sir;" and Judge Tennant, trying hard to frown, rapped heavily to silence the roar of laughter that followed the reply.

"In that case, why did he use a whip? The plaintiff isn't a horse, is he?"

"No, sir; but Jim said a whip and a rod amounted to the same thing when he was a boy."

"Ah!" exclaimed the attorney, stroking the back of his trousers reminiscently, while the spectators were convulsed with merriment. "But why did he use the whip in the sense of a rod?"

"Because, according to the Bible, Bartley is a fool—no, I mean, because the Bible says to use the rod on a fool's back, and that's what Bartley is."

And so it went on until Judge Tennant commanded the attorney to desist from that line of questioning, and threatened to clear the court if further disorder occurred. There was practically no conflict of testimony, the defense striving merely to enlarge upon those facts which would put the affair in the best light for Bradshaw, and the worst for Bartley. When the time came to sum up, Van Kleeck for the defense reviewed the case in a serio-comic strain, while Hemingway, for the people, denounced in extravagant terms the outrageous assault upon "one of our most prominent citizens, the highly respected, law-abiding, inoffensive editor of *Chips*." A gasp of surprise and protest from his auditors quickly changed to a titter of amusement as they remembered that the prosecutor, who maintained throughout his speech an unnaturally solemn expression, was one of the most outspoken opponents of Bartley, unofficially, in all Midland.

The jury deliberated less than five minutes, but the verdict surprised everyone. The foreman, Perley Heald, a surveyor, and one of the most active and in-

fluential young men in Midland, announced the finding of the jury as follows:

"We find the defendant guilty of assault, and we respectfully beg leave to say that we heartily approve of his act. We would earnestly recommend that Your Honor sentence the defendant to pay a fine of twelve dollars with no further punishment."

As soon as the judge succeeded in partially restoring order in the court room, and in recovering from his own surprise at this remarkable verdict, he rebuked the jury for exceeding their prerogative and for indulging in such unheard of opinions; then he forthwith accepted their recommendation and imposed a fine of twelve dollars. Immediately the foreman of the jury spoke up again and gave the court the greatest surprise of all.

"Your Honor, this jury begs the privilege of paying the fine just imposed, each man contributing one dollar of the amount."

The judge found it difficult to preserve his own dignity, and although he hammered his desk vigorously, the crowd had by this time gotten beyond his control. As soon as he could be heard he informed the jury that he knew of no legal obstacle in the way of their paying the fine if they wished and if the defendant was willing; so the money was handed forthwith to the clerk. The jury, on being discharged, crowded around Bradshaw, laughing and enthusiastic. "We couldn't say you didn't do it, Jim," declared one, "because we all knew you did, and we all wanted to buy a share in the job ourselves."

Sam Hawkins had learned the details of the public whipping of Bartley and of the subsequent trial and verdict with conflicting emotions. He was very busy in getting ready for the active logging season just about to open and had given up all idea of contesting with Bartley the purchase of the Hammond property.

A letter of protest to Dominie & Son had resulted in nothing more satisfactory than that they claimed having written to him, and that as no reply had been received they had felt at liberty to cancel the option and sell the property to the first bona fide customer who came along. Sam had realized his helplessness against such opponents as Bartley and Dominie & Son would be, so he had concluded to let the matter drop. Perhaps, as Mr. Brinton had suggested, he could find some other opportunity after he got his logs to the contractors who had agreed to take them.

It was fortunate for the young man that the imperative demands of his present enterprise claimed so much of his time and thought. In the bustle and energy of swamping, with men and ox teams busy clearing the way to fallen timber which lay already cut into saw logs of the proper length; in the invigorating atmosphere of approaching winter, with the first snow on the ground and the snapping cold of late November making all hands eager for the work; in the strenuous activity of breaking and trampling roads during the process of freezing, and in the responsibilities of supplying the camp and looking after the many affairs of the moment, Sam's sense of injury and the keen edge of his resentment began to dull. Bartley and his offenses occupied a smaller place, relatively, in the field of his mental vision, and became a correspondingly less disturbing factor in his daily life. While this did not help Sam in approaching the task which Parson Allen had urged upon him, it certainly did not drive him farther from it. The minister had seen the attack upon Sam in *Chips* and had assured him that he need fear no hurt from it in the opinion of his neighbors and friends. On the contrary it would probably have the effect of increasing their sympathy.

"But as for you, my dear fellow," the minister

had exclaimed with characteristic enthusiasm, "don't let it trouble you for a single moment—no, indeed, you are to be congratulated; you have cause to 'rejoice and be exceeding glad'!"

"What for?" asked Sam in amazement; "is it anything to rejoice over when I am called a hypocrite and all my past wrong doings paraded in print before the very people I am trying to make forget them?"

"Just so, exactly, if the charge of hypocrisy is false. It brings you directly under the blessing. Here you have it—look at this," and Allen pulled out a little pocket New Testament: "'Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad; for great is your reward in Heaven; for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you'. Doesn't that put a different light on the matter? Is it a mean thing to be reckoned worthy of reviling 'for His sake'? Is it no subject for congratulation and rejoicing that you have so sure a title to a 'great reward in Heaven'?"

So this warm-hearted, eager man strove to bring calm and comfort to Sam and to turn his thoughts into pleasanter channels; and the young man, sincere in his wish to merit the trust of Robert Allen, earnest in his desire to do something that would in a measure atone for the sins of other days, tried hard to bring himself into agreement with the minister's views.

The season was far advanced before anything had been accomplished in the work of getting the logs to the skids or to the rollway. The sawyers, and choppers, and road makers were at work early and late, and made the woods tuneful with their merry whistling. Blue jays and squirrels chattered in the crisp air, busy with their own share of winter activity. Not until the week before Christmas were the roads solid, and not until

then was there snow enough for the heavy bob sleighs. About the twenty-second of December a storm of snow, with biting cold, came on the wings of the northwest wind. It lasted several days. Lower and lower dropped the mercury and higher rose the hopes of the lumbermen. Preparations were all made, and there was nothing to do on Christmas day but to wait and make merry in camp. As soon as the storm ceased, ox teams with travoys would be sent out to break the trails, and teams of horses with empty sleighs would be driven over the several roads before the hauling could begin. While the roads to the banking ground are being opened, the swampers with their travoys, or drays, hasten to get out the logs and fill the skids ready for the scalers and teamsters. The scaling is done while the logs are still on the skid, or on the load. With a large sledge branding-iron the scaler for the contractors strikes the company mark on each end of every log, after which the logs may be unloaded promiscuously at the rollway where dozens of buyers representing different firms may have logs banked. The loss of even one log so branded is a rare thing.

The work of loading the logs on the sleighs requires much care and skill. The sleighs are made very strong, and although the bobs track seldom more than about four feet, the bunkers are six to seven feet, with strong spikes ranged across to prevent the bottom logs of the load from slipping. A link or clevis is attached at each end of the bunker to fasten the chain which holds the load in place. The size of the load depends upon the condition of the road, the skill of the teamster and the strength of his horses. Many serious accidents have occurred in loading and hauling when the work was not done with sufficient watchfulness and good judgment. To load the first tier of logs on the sleigh is a simple matter. The front of the skid is just a

little higher than the sleigh and the logs are merely rolled off and the bunkers filled. Sometimes two very large logs will fill them; sometimes five smaller logs can be ranged side by side. A second tier is rolled over these, resting between the lower logs. The higher the load is built, the more difficult and dangerous is the task. With five logs for the first tier, the second would usually contain four, the third three, the fourth two, and a top log would rest above these as an apex, making the entire load fifteen logs, bound together at each end with a heavy log chain—an enormous weight. The logs forming the upper tiers are rolled up by means of long chains fastened to the opposite side of the sleigh and passed over the top of the load, under the log to be drawn up, and back over the load to the horses or oxen who help in the loading. As this team starts, the log is lifted and rolled at the same time to its place at the top of the load. If it goes a few inches too far it is hurled to the ground, and sometimes falls upon the team or driver. The least result of such an accident is a considerable delay in starting off with the load. Much rivalry exists between expert teamsters, however, and even larger loads than fifteen logs have been put upon sleighs and drawn long distances by single teams of horses when the roads were packed hard and smooth. The acme of skill and daring is reached when loads are built up with almost straight sides for six or seven tiers, a chain being passed around each tier separately and fastened to the bunkers. The driver who can shake his lines over his team from the highest perch is proud and boastful of his achievement, yet he will usually consider his horses before his vanity, and seldom is a driver found who will abuse the animals, or ask them to do more than their strength will allow.

Joel Bailey and Pete Murray were two of the best loaders and teamsters in the county. They carried im-

mense loads, and neither had been known to have any serious accident. Better horses than theirs could not be found in the region, and the horses knew their masters. The best of treatment, with plenty to eat, kept them always in perfect condition. They were never found wanting in sagacity nor strength when put to the test. The spirit of their drivers seemed theirs in every struggle with the heavy, treacherous logs, and every contest with rival teams. Joel and Pete were bosom friends notwithstanding that the keenest professional rivalry existed between them. They earned the best wages and were always in great demand among the lumbermen for miles around. Early in the summer Sam had persuaded them to help him this season. Partly to encourage the young man in his first serious and legitimate business enterprise, and partly because of their warm friendship for his father, they accepted the engagement.

The morning after Christmas was still and cold. Brilliant starlight the night before, after the setting of the moon, had proclaimed the passing of the storm. While yet the stars were sparkling in the heavens, swampers, with ox teams and travoys had plunged into the snow drifts breaking the trails. Sam had planned to clear the northwest quarter of his quarter section. It was the most difficult part of his holdings to get at, because most of the logs were in a swamp and must be taken out while the weather was cold. Those on the ridge could be easily skidded later. The southeast quarter was nearer to the Red-Keg rollway by half a mile, and the log road from the skidways intersected the State road about a quarter of a mile above a private road which branched off eastward to the Sturgeon where MacMurtrie & Davis were operating a rollway.

Pete Murray slipped out of his bunk and drew on his boots about three hours before sunrise. He chuckled

as he looked at his watch by the dim light of a kerosene lamp fastened to a post in the men's shanty; then he made his way out through the snow toward the barn. As he came near, the door opened and Joel Bailey stepped out. Pete started, and smiled sheepishly.

"Out kinder airly, ain't ye?" he asked.

"Yaas, a leetle," drawled Joel, who had just been filling the oat boxes for his horses. "But, you see, I'm a-goin' ter git the fust load o' logs down to the bank from this farm. Hain't in the habit o' snoozin' late like some folks I know."

"Indade! It's the smart lad ye are, intirely. Shall I wait for ye at the rollway after I dump me load so's we kin go back together?"

Without waiting for further banter, Pete entered the barn, and in a jiffy his horses, too, were munching their oats. The camp was soon alive with bustling activity. One team driven by Ros Whitmore was dispatched to the lower, or ridge road. Pete and Joel were to work the northernmost, or section-line road. The teams were driven from the barn to the skids, and from the skids down to the banking ground, and when Joel and Pete returned at eight o'clock each of their two skids had been filled with logs, scaled and marked, ready for loading. Ros Whitmore, having his roads fairly well cut out, went to the ridge with one swamper and a helper and began hauling from there. In a few days two other teams would arrive, but for the present the hauling would be confined to Pete, Joel, and Ros.

The ridge road connected with the section-line road on the northwest quarter, passing around to the back of the farm proper, but was not considered a good road for present purposes on account of several bad swales through which it passed, although it was somewhat shorter than the section-line road to the State road and then to Red-Keg. Many other operators, also, were on

the move on the State road, and while this traffic had made it fairly passable early in the morning, it was not yet in condition for large loads.

As Joel and Pete rounded up to their respective skidways at eight o'clock Joel called out, "Four logs the limit, this time," and Pete responded, "Right, me bye, but ye may as well make it a race for the biggest number of logs the hull day. It'll be the loadin' when the road is good thet shows the best man."

This was agreed upon. Each skid was to have two cant-hook men to assist in loading, but each teamster must use his own team when the load overtopped the reach of the skid men. With right good will all hands sprang to their respective tasks and the race was on.

CHAPTER XIV

Two loads apiece reached the rollway at Red-Keg before dinner time, with the result thus far a tie. The roads were too heavy to admit of large loads, but traffic on the State road was incessant, so that every hour of the forenoon had brought improvement. It had been agreed between Joel and Pete that a full hour for rest and feeding should be allowed their teams, and that the horses should be unharnessed, placed in the barn, and blanketed during this hour. In the Red-Keg tavern where they ate their dinner to avoid the delay of returning to camp, each man kept close watch of the other to see that he did not slip away before the time was up. When Pete went out, Joel was at his side, and they reached the barn together. In a jiffy the horses were out and the harnesses thrown over them. For some unaccountable reason Pete fumbled with the straps and lost several minutes in hitching up. Before he was ready, Joel sprang to his seat and started off.

"By, by, Pete," cried Joel, banteringly, "if they's any logs left on the near skid after I git my load, I'll leave 'em for you."

"Do, Joe, that's a good bye; I ain't as young an' spry as the likes o' you, but mebbe ye'll not be too hard on an old man."

There was a sly twinkle in his eye as he watched Joel disappear in a bend of the road leading from the village. In the next instant he had thrown on his binder, wrapped up his chains and started after the rival. The pretended trouble with the harness had been a ruse to

get rid of Joel's company for the return trip. When he came to the cut-off ridge road leading through the swales back to the skidways by a shorter route, Pete turned his horses into that road and plunged deliberately through the unbroken snow drifts. The empty sleigh was light, and the road most of the way was protected from the storm, so that he saved at least ten minutes on the trip. When Joel arrived at the skidways, he stopped dumfounded at the sight of Pete and his crew busy loading his sleigh from the nearer of the two skids.

"Thunderation!" he yelled, as he rounded up to the other skid about a hundred feet further away, "how in tarnation did you git here ahead o' me?" Then noticing the snow-covered legs of Pete's horses, he exclaimed, "I see, ye came through the short-cut road. Might a-knowed ye'd be up to some o' your tricks, but ye took big chances in them holes. Whoa, Nellie! Git around there, Flora! Whoa! back up! whoa! Here, George, Ike, git onto them logs in a hurry; what ye waitin' for? Pete's got two on already. Ef he beats me, you're licked, too, remember."

While he spoke, the logs began to roll upon the bunkers of his sleigh.

"Be aisy, Joe; be aisy now," cried Pete. "The limit's off; only what yer sleigh an' horses can carry; and kape this in mind; it's not the number o' loads, but the number o' logs thet counts."

The loading went on with a rush accompanied with a lively fire of remarks, commands, and the good-natured oaths which form an inseparable part of the lumberjack's ordinary conversation. Each teamster cast frequent glances toward his rival on the opposite side of the road to watch for any chance advantage. Five logs on the bunkers, and four on top of them, with a third tier of three logs were all Pete dared to attempt,

after testing his load, for the roads were not yet packed hard this side the State road. He looked speculatively at Joel's load which was built up only to the second tier. His skid men were just putting the ninth log in place. Would he attempt more than twelve? Pete dared not ask, nor did he care to lose time in waiting to see. "He'll git stuck if he does," was his conclusion as he bound down his load and started off.

But Joel was too smart to take the risk Pete had avoided. Although it offered a chance to gain a log, he decided to wait until next time, because he saw on his skid a number of small logs, and figured that he could put six on the bunkers when he came for another load. Pete would hardly go to the farther skid if he got back first. With the same number of logs as Pete had taken, therefore, he hurried after his rival and reached the banking ground when the latter was half unloaded. Neither lost a moment in returning, and Pete, having a comfortable margin of time, shunned the treacherous short cut, where dangerous holes had been escaped on his previous trip only by good fortune.

It would be possible, at most, to take two more loads to the rollway before night. These two must decide the contest. Pete inspected the roads with a critical eye on his way back to the skids. He decided to try fourteen logs this time, and leave the question of the last load to be determined by developments.

Three logs were on the bunkers when Joel drove up, and the latter gave them a quick scrutiny as he passed on to the farther skid. He observed with satisfaction that it would be impossible to put more than five of such size on the first tier, and his own smaller logs would give him an advantage of one to begin with. The excitement of the moment kept him from indulging in banter. Without a word to Pete he began push-

ing the work of loading. The small logs were quickly rolled from the skidway. Six went on the bunkers, without trouble. Pete saw it and swore under his breath. He would have to change his plans and risk a larger load. Joel put on four larger logs for his second tier; there were no more small ones. Pete had three tiers with twelve logs, and was putting on a fourth tier of two.

As his load was built it would be impossible to take more than fifteen, whereas Joel could cap his load with a sixteenth log if he chose. Would he do it? Could he haul it if he did? Never mind, it was too late to change now. If necessary to make up the difference it must be done on the last load. The chains were ready for hauling up the fifteenth log. Pete was anxious to start as quickly as possible. The team on the opposite side of the load began to haul away and the log rose quickly. Suddenly one of the chains caught on the load while the other kept on moving. Only an instant, and then the tangled chain straightened with a jerk and the log moved on to the top of the load. The team was stopped just in time to prevent pulling the log over the load, but the irregular action of the chain had thrown the log out of alinement with the others and it rested nearly two feet back of its proper place.

"Hand spikes, Tom! Jim, quick, git up here! spike the baste for'ard! 'Twill play the divil if ye don't take care," cried Pete excitedly. "Go asy there; don't crowd the under logs off; begorry, Joe will bate us intirely." Then, fearing that his rival had heard the last remark, he added in a louder tone, "no, I'm dummed if he will; we've got him bate from here till ballyhoo! Go asy, boys; that's right; now bind her down."

Scarcely more than two minutes had been lost by the delay with the log; but Joel was also binding his load. Pete saw that he had, indeed, put on the sixteenth log

and stood one ahead if he reached the banking ground safely. Nevertheless, the big Irishman mounted his load and called to his team to start. The crisp snow creaked as the horses bent hard to their task and broke out the wide runners which had been frozen to the snow while standing. The cold was growing sharper as the afternoon advanced. Once started the load moved more easily, and Pete was off for the rollway. He glanced back for an instant to note how it fared with Joel, and saw that he was just climbing to his seat. No doubt he would be close behind him in another moment. There was no time to lose. He had yet to face the task of matching Joel's extra log and gaining one or more besides—a hard task as matters stood. With all possible speed he covered the distance to Red-Keg and began to unload. Joel had not followed him as closely as expected. Not until twelve of Pete's logs were on the bank did the other team arrive. With surprise, Pete observed that the cap log was missing.

"Yaas," drawled Joel sheepishly, with a scowl that was half a grin, "the blame sleigh froze to the ground, an' I couldn't break it out till I drapped a log, cuss it!"

"Niver mind, Joe, dear; ye've one more chance; an' don't be bitin' off more than ye can chew. Ye'll be bate by a better man, an' that thought will be a comfort to ye."

"We'll hev to see about that," replied Joel, as he hustled the logs from his load. "I'm not licked yet, an' ef I was you, I wouldn't crow before I got out o' the woods."

The sun was rapidly dropping toward the western horizon, as Pete started away from the river. It would be impossible to get another load down before dark; but time to the lumber-jack is disregarded when the weather is right for work. The young moon would

give plenty of light on the snow for some time, and one more load must be brought down whatever the time. Pete had been exercising his wits busily during the past hour or two. While he knew he must depend largely upon the strength and willingness of his horses for success, still he realized that mere brute force won few contests. It would be well if he could add brains to the muscle in the final struggle. On his way past the tavern he halted his sleigh and disappeared into the bar-room to find the landlord. In a moment he came out and went to the stable, from which he brought a large armful of bedding straw. This he fastened on the bunker of his sleigh as a seat and then continued on his return trip to the skidway. Several moments were consumed by this little errand, but Pete seemed in no particular hurry. The roads were in almost perfect condition after the day's constant traffic. The State road, over which scores of loads had passed, was hard and smooth. The section road and the log road leading off through Sam's farm were fairly good. As Pete passed the farm grounds he met the scaler and marker returning to Red-Keg on foot. They could not work to advantage after dark.

"Knockin' off airly, ain't ye, byes?" said Pete, pulling up. "Have ye left enough logs marked for us? Me an' Joel's goin' down with another load."

"Yep; guess you won't want more'n eighteen or twenty logs. We left that many scaled at the front of each skid. The swampers are still at work, and the skid men are waitin' for you. Hello, here comes Joel."

With a quick glance over his shoulder, Pete tightened his lines, called to his horses, and moved on rapidly in the direction of the skidways. As evening settled, the frost increased. The cant-hook men had built a big brush fire to keep them warm during the wait for the

two teamsters. Pete reached the nearer skid first, and paused before turning his team and sleigh to let Joel pass.

"Wall, I'll be jiggered! Goin' to make your bed here?" cried Joel, catching sight of the straw on Pete's sleigh.

"It's the straw, is it, ye mane?" replied Pete. "Sure, straw's a foine thing if ye know how to use it."

As Joel passed, Pete rounded to his skid, but stopped before coming quite up to it. Taking a big handful of straw, he spread it carefully in the sleigh ruts directly in front of the skid, so that it lay thin and smooth just where the runners would rest. Then he drove his sleigh into place upon the straw. After a quick inspection, finding everything to his liking, he quickly gathered up the remainder of the straw and threw it upon the blazing fire. Joel watched the unusual proceeding with surprise and quick comprehension. He saw that he had been tricked.

"So that's your game, is it?" he growled; "wall, by thunder, it's no fair! Seems to me ye ought to pull again frosted runners as much as me."

"Asy, now, Joe, dear. Ye know right well it's fair an' square intirely. The trick never occurred to ye, that's all. This load's goin' to win, me bye. Ye didn't suppose I'd make any doubt o' that, did ye? Come on byes, its five on the first an' five on the second this time."

Joel realized that there was no help for it. He dared not risk more than fifteen logs with the reasonable certainty that his runners would freeze to the ground before he could start. Pete could take any number up to twenty if he chose. The only chance was that he might attempt too much. Suddenly a thought flashed into Joel's mind. He stood still a moment to grasp it fully; then he grinned and ordered his loaders to put

the same number of logs on his sleigh that Pete took. Two tiers of five each were on, the first tier being bound in place with chains before the second was loaded. Pete, watching his own work and his rival's, was startled at this apparent defiance of frost. As soon as Joel's second tier was on he started up his team, swung around a circle and drew up again before the skid. The runners had begun to freeze but the movement broke the adhesion before it had gone too far. When his sleigh was once more in place, and the cant-hook men were busy dragging up the third tier logs, Joel hastened to the brush fire, and, gathering as many live embers as he could handle by their unburnt ends, laid them along close to his runners taking care that the woodwork did not catch fire. If there was any way to get the better of the frost, he was bound to do it. Pete laughed aloud as he noted these precautions. His load contained seventeen logs. With a critical eye he judged the chances before ordering a fifth tier of two logs to be hoisted with the chains. When all were bound firmly, Pete hesitated whether to risk capping with a twentieth log. His experience told him it would be unwise. His team had had a hard day; the logging road was only one day old; the frost was severe. He guessed he'd stake his reputation on the nineteen. If Joel was reckless enough to take advantage of the extra log—well the result would tell where prudence and good judgment lay.

"Now, byes, git back there an' give her a bite with yer hand-spikes," commanded Pete when all was ready for the start. With an encouraging word to his horses, who bent mightily to their task, Pete felt the great load move slowly on the straw, then, reaching the icy ruts beyond, it slid along with increasing momentum, as a ship on its ways, until all doubt of a successful start had vanished and Pete Murray was on the road to Red-

Keg with one of the biggest loads ever drawn in Midland County.

Joel had completed his loading almost at the same time and was binding down as Pete started. Nineteen logs made his load. He was satisfied to tie Pete this time. Some other day when conditions were better he would beat him. As the Irishman gathered up his lines he heard a sharp snap and a rattle of chains on Joel's load. A quick glance told him that his rival's binder had parted at the point of greatest leverage under the combined weight of Joel and one of his men as they brought down the binding pole.

"Hard luck for the bye," he remarked to his own men. "That will kape him a quarter of an hour, mebbe, puttin' me in a cold-shut. Hope he won't get stuck in the frost."

The moonlight already made the road brilliant as Pete proceeded on his way. It would have to be a steady pull until the banking ground was reached. He could not risk a moment to rest his team for fear they might be unable to start again. Past the farm house he went. The ridge road half a mile below would soon be reached. Beyond that the road was harder and the load would move easier. As he drew near the intersection, he distinctly saw a team coming out of the ridge road to the left with a load of logs. Had Joel ventured around that way? The thought had hardly formulated itself when Pete rejected it as impossible. This was a small load drawn by a grey team. Joel's horses were both bays. On the instant Pete remembered that "Red" Lampheer owned and drove a grey team, and that he was operating for MacMurtrie & Davis on Section twenty-six, cornering on the southeast with twenty-two. The firm had an unsavory reputation, though nobody had been able to make any specific charge against them. "Red," however, was not only

thoroughly disliked by the farmer lumbermen of the vicinity, but was known to be utterly unscrupulous, a daredevil always ready to fight or to engage in any outlawry that offered. As the two teams approached the intersection of the roads, Pete was convinced that the driver of the grey horses was Red Lampheer. His suspicions were immediately aroused by the man's presence on Sam's private logging road. Pete was nearer the intersection than Red and would naturally pass before the latter reached the main road. Without a moment's hesitation, he pushed ahead, determined to call Red to account later, but the intruder had other plans.

"Hol' on there, you, an' let me pass!" yelled Red, giving at the same time a cut with his whip upon the backs of his horses.

"Not much!" cried Pete in return. "Don't ye see the size o' this load? I'll be after stoppin' it at the bankin' ground, not sooner."

"What do I care for your load? I'm goin' out o' here ahead. Stop you ol' crow baits till I git by, or I'll ram ye."

"Ye better not, me bye, if ye care for a whole head," replied Pete, still giving his team full rein. The words were scarcely out of his mouth when Red Lampheer drove full tilt into his team in the effort to force a passage.

"What do ye mane, ye pirate, tryin' to ruin my horses?" roared Pete, beside himself with rage at the sight of his team struggling to free themselves, as the heavy load with the force of its momentum crowded them forward in a hopeless tangle with the other horses. "Ye bloody spalpeen, wait till I git down to ye; what are ye doin', anyhow, comin' out o' Mr. Hawkins's road with a load o' logs, ye thafe?"

As Pete sprang to the ground to engage his antag-

onist, he saw for the first time that two other men were with him. With howls and curses, all three set upon Pete, promising to "smash" him in quick order; but they had reckoned on too easy a victory. Pete was a mighty six-footer, lithe and agile despite his great weight. His muscles were like tempered steel. Few could match him in power or endurance. Quicker than words he doubled up one of his assailants with a terrific kick in the stomach, while almost in the same instant a powerful left-hand blow on the jaw sent the second headlong into the snow. The sleighs had become interlocked side by side, and the horses, now out of danger, had ceased to struggle and waited quietly, glad of a rest, until their drivers should untangle harnesses and sleighs.

Red Lampheer was still rampant. Furious at the sudden downfall of his men, his own hot blood leaping with mad eagerness for the fray, he hurled himself upon the big Irishman, glad of a chance to finish the fight begun more than two months before at the tavern. Around and around in the snow they struggled, every object and every movement plainly revealed by the moonlight. Red was perhaps the one man in all these woods most qualified to give Pete the battle of his life. Tall, wiry, with long, brawny arms, and great bony hands, Red was also a recklessly brutal fighter ready to seize any opportunity to maim or mutilate his adversary. Time and again the two men fell struggling to the road or into the banks of snow at the side. Pete like a cat managed always to come up on top, but was unable to tear lose the long arms which held him in their fierce grip, therefore he could not deliver a blow effective enough to cause Red a moment's confusion. The man who had received the kick in the stomach lay writhing in the road at the rear of the sleigh unable to take any further part in the fight; but the second man soon

recovered, and hastened to Red's relief. Pete was still grappling with his antagonist in the snow. Lampheer, watching his chance, had seized the thumb of Pete's right hand between his teeth and was deliberately trying to bite it off when his helper came up. The fellow who had received Pete's left-hand blow in the jaw longed for revenge. Aiming a vicious blow with his fist at the Irishman's head, he struck out with all the strength he possessed. Pete saw his intention on the instant. With a mighty effort he twisted his body around and Lampheer's head received the full benefit of his friend's sledge-hammer blow. A quiver went through his frame; his jaws loosened from the lacerated thumb, and Pete again had both hands free to give the newcomer a fitting reception. Red was only temporarily staggered, even by the terrible blow given him by mistake. His body seemed like iron. That single moment of relaxation was enough, however, for Pete to wrench himself free from the long arms. He needed to act quickly, for the man who had wasted one blow was ready to follow it with another, which he declared, with an oath, should not go astray. As he struck out, Pete leaped quickly to one side. The force of the man's effort, expended on the air, carried him forward a step to keep his balance. Pete quickly raised his foot to kick the fellow in the stomach, as he had done the first man; but suddenly his other foot was knocked from under him, and he fell sprawling in the snow. Unthinkingly, he had approached the spot where the first man lay near Lampheer's sleigh. The prostrate man, though unable to rejoin his companions, was beginning to watch again the course of the fight. As Pete raised his foot the man kicked out quickly at the other foot, with the result that Pete was overthrown. Immediately the second man sprang upon the fallen Irishman, pounding him with all his might. Not one of the

fighters saw or heard the approach of another sleigh; but Pete, in his desperate position, recognized with a shout of joy Joel's voice as he called out, close at hand.

"Hi, there! What in all tarnation's up? Git off there, ye devil! Take that—an' here's another. What's the row, Pete? Are ye hurt?"

Joel had hauled up his own team as soon as he saw Pete's sleigh standing still in the road and a fight going on near by. All thought of a log-drawing match had vanished from his mind. Without an instant's delay he had rushed pell mell into the melee. Grabbing by the collar of his wammus the man who was pummelling Pete, he hammered his head once or twice with his fist and then gave the garment a wringing motion which quickly choked the fight out of him. Pete sprang quickly to his feet only to find that Red Lampheer had recovered and was sneaking around his sleigh as though in search of something.

"Give 'em Billy hell, Joe; they're log pirates, stealin' Sam's logs—hold on there ye murderin' spalpeen!" he exclaimed to Red who was reaching for an ax which lay between two logs on his load, bit down. "Lay a hand on that an' I'll brain ye." Pete snatched up a hand-spike and raised it over the head of his desperate foe.

Red hesitated a moment, measuring his chances; then he dropped his hand, and looked furtively to one side and the other.

"Now hold up your hands," ordered Pete, the hand-spike still held aloft.

"Not if I know it!" snarled the ruffian, and quicker than a flash he threw himself on Pete, whose downward blow fell heavily on the load of logs. This onslaught was like that of a wounded and dying wildcat making its one last great desperate attack. Red butted Pete

"Joel was fresh; his fighting blood was just beginning to boil."

full in the stomach, knocking him senseless over on the small load of logs. Joel had seen this maneuver, and with a curse at the half-strangled lumber-jack, cast him to the ground, and went to the rescue of his friend. The same strangle hold he had just used with such effect was applied with lightning celerity to Lampheer before he could recover himself from his rush. Joel was fresh; his fighting blood was just beginning to boil; even the redoubtable Red could not resist his assault. In a moment the bully was groveling in the snow begging for mercy.

"Mercy, ye coward! Ye cutthroat! What do you know about mercy? How much were ye goin' to show Pete if I hadn't turned up? I'll have ye strung up in a minute, as soon as Pete is able to help."

But when Pete was himself again, it was decided that their prisoners should be bound and taken to Red-Keg. Lampheer was immediately tied hand and foot with ropes, but before the other two men could be given like attention they managed to sneak away into the woods, and Pete declared they were not worth the bother of a chase. When the teams were released from their tangle, it was found that Pete's load would not budge. Joel could not go on while the road in front of him was blocked, so both agreed to throw off two logs to lighten their loads. That done, each man had seventeen. Red Lampheer was placed on his own load, the lines drawn up and fastened, and the team left to make its own way behind Pete and ahead of Joel. So they reached Red-Keg. The banking ground was deserted; the village had settled into quiet, except at the tavern where a crowd of lumber-jacks held forth noisily. Quickly the two big loads were deposited on the bank and the jaded teams taken to the tavern barn, Joel and Pete taking turns, meanwhile, guarding Lampheer. Not until Tom Moore, the village constable, had been

hunted up and had relieved them of their prisoner, did the contestants of the day allude to the log-hauling match. Then over a belated supper Joel suddenly remarked:

"Didn't nobody win an allfired lot, did they, Pete?"

"Sure, it was a tie all day, me bye; an' we inded up with a tie. Ask Red."

CHAPTER XV

The widow Ravenstock's life was lonely and full of bitterness. There were few, very few, who ever had a kind word for her, or a bit of help when needed. The "old hag" they called her, making of her almost as dreadful a bugaboo to scare naughty children as they made of her misshapen son Percy. The two lived in a little cottage just outside the village—their only visible means of support a tiny truck garden in the door yard. Children shunned the place at all times; grown persons, though not admitting any fear, found it convenient to avoid passing the cottage after dark. The unfortunate old woman resented the treatment her Percy received from the people in general. Her protests were illjudged as to time and place and as to the persons to whom they were usually addressed. Bad boys called after her on the street with taunts and insults. When she turned on them with bitter, loud-voiced reproaches, they ran away and threw stones. Percy, whose blind, passionate devotion for his mother resulted in little practical service for the bettering of their lot, prowled about to avenge these insults. Sometimes he caught one of the boys who threw stones, and inflicted punishment to fit the crime, but the lad's cries usually brought assistance, and the dwarf was driven off with his sense of justice unsatisfied. Thus it came that mother and son, for no real fault of their own, suffered persecution and neglect, which filled them with hatred for the villagers of Midland, excepting Nell Tompkins.

Spring was opening early after a hard winter. A

week of warm weather, unusual for March, had caused the snow drifts to disappear and had brought the frost out of the ground, converting the roads into quagmires. The river was full of logs from rollways which had been broken at least ten days earlier than was anticipated. Sam Hawkins was congratulating himself on having all his logs at the banking ground in time. There were other lumbermen less fortunate. Mr. Brinton felt the call of spring and became daily more impatient to move out to his farm; but Mrs. Brinton insisted that May first was soon enough. She painted the condition of the roads in support of her contention. True, nothing would suffer from the delay, because John Carroll and his sister Bessie had been installed at the farmhouse since the first of February, and all was being done inside and outside which the season required. Brinton contented himself for the present, therefore, by frequent trips to the farm for the purpose of directing the work and taking out groceries and other supplies to the Carrolls.

One morning, early, as Brinton stood talking to Marks, the grocer, after ordering a varied assortment of provisions for his own use and for the farm, a sudden cry, a scuffle, and the sound of hurrying feet outside the little store interrupted them. The grocer ran out and found his clerk holding a broken basket in his hand, while all about him on the wooden platform were scattered parcels and vegetables.

"Look at what that humpback done!" cried the boy. "He's a thief! There he goes! See him, up the road! He came sneaking around, innocent-like, and all of a sudden, when he thought nobody weren't lookin', he grabbed this basket. I seen him do it, an' I grabbed it, too. He got the handle, but that's all." The boy began picking up the scattered groceries.

"Plague take him!" exclaimed Marks. "I've been

expecting he'd steal something one of these days. More'n once I've caught him hanging around the store eyeing the things as if he meant to get his hands on them when he got a chance. That's Anderson's order, Bob; you'll have to get the bill and make it up again. If that imp of Satan comes around here again I'll have him locked up."

"Is the poor fellow so hard up that he's driven to steal food, I wonder," said Brinton, returning to the store with the grocer.

"Reckon he's hard up enough. He don't work; nobody'll have him. Everybody seems to be afraid of him, and he hates them for it. He and his mother ain't got any money—never did have that I know of."

"How in the world did they live through the winter?" asked the editor, with an uncomfortable sense of self-blame.

"Well, I spose the poor wretches did have it pretty hard," admitted Marks. "If it hadn't been for that Tompkins girl, like enough they'd have starved."

"Please tell me all you know about the matter. I'm ashamed to say that this is the first I've heard they were so destitute."

"Oh, everybody could know it, I spose, if they bothered themselves to find out. It stands to reason the old hag and her humpback can't live on nothing; but they're such a nuisance to the neighborhood, nobody feels like encouraging them—at least nobody except Nell Tompkins, and she tries to keep folks from knowing it. Every week this winter, and I don't know how long before, she's been giving them groceries. I found it out, by happening to see the dwarf go to her door one day and take away a basket of stuff just the way it went out of this store. She buys double what she wants for herself and her mother every Saturday, and that's where it goes."

"Miss Tompkins shames us all, then," declared Brinton with emphasis. "The girl is the sole support of her mother, and she earns small enough wages, I'll warrant; yet here she is practicing systematic charity, helping those whom everyone else shuns, and doing her alms in secret, besides. I tell you, Marks, she shames us all, and that means *you*, and it means *me*. What is more, there's a promise in God's Word that applies to her, and you can depend upon it that her Father in Heaven who seeth in secret will one of these days reward her openly."

Something had flared up in Brinton, something which he himself could hardly understand. A hot flush of real shame swept over him that he had allowed a family to starve almost at his door His ignorance of the fact did not seem any excuse; he ought to have known. He had been living in comfort, with money to spare for indulgences; yet he had allowed a girl, earning her own living and supporting a widowed mother, to bear alone the burden which he could have taken so easily. And this girl! He had judged her harshly without knowing her. Surely no girl with the heart to do what she had been doing all through the hard winter, and with the modesty to keep it from the eyes of the world could be other than a good girl. "Good? She's better than I am!" was the editor's inward verdict.

"Come, Marks, what are you waiting for? Get my stuff together, I must hurry."

"Beg pardon, Mr. Brinton, you seemed kinder—that is, of course, there's something in what you say, if you look at it that way. We can't all do it. Here's your order, all ready, sir. I'll put it in a box."

Brinton looked at the packages piled together on the counter.

"That can't be right," he said; "let me see the slip; I'm sure I want more than that."

"Just what you ordered, sir; here it is; you can check up the list yourself."

"I see—um—well, that won't do; I'll have to have more. There are so many mouths to feed now, I sometimes forget how the family has grown. You'd better make out a new list."

When the supplies were finally gathered together and placed in the back of Mr. Brinton's wagon, there was more than double the original quantity. He drove to his house in the village and put up his horse. Some of the groceries he carried into the house, but a large share of them he left in the wagon, covered out of sight with a blanket. As he walked down to *The Pioneer*, a new idea took possession of him. Ned should know what kind of a girl Nell Tompkins was. He, too, had thought ill of her; he must do her justice. The matter of the letter was still unexplained; but being unexplained, she should have the benefit of whatever doubt there might be of any deception or wrong doing on her part. If charity could cover a multitude of real sins, certainly it ought to cover sins that were only suspected, and who could be more deserving of such "charity" than one who bestowed charity upon the poor? Ned certainly must know, and it would do no harm to let him see the objects of her care, and have a part in the same lesson Brinton had set himself to learn.

"We're going to make a call this afternoon, Ned; that is, if you will go with me," he announced to his foreman after dinner. "Manny can look after the office and see to closing."

"I shall be glad to go, certainly. Where is it to be?"

"Just outside the village—the widow Ravenstock and her son."

Ned started; nothing could have been more unexpected, nor much more unwelcome. He began to demur.

"I'm afraid I wouldn't be wanted there. They are strange persons. The dwarf acts as if he wanted to eat me whenever he sees me. He apparently has the most violent hatred for me, although I never spoke a word to him nor came into contact whatever with him. He scowls and shows his teeth like a wild animal if I happen to be near him, and one day I'm sure he was actually going to strike me with a piece of wood he had in his hand, if I hadn't suddenly moved out of his reach. I don't know what to make of it, but I can't help noticing his behavior. Why, Jake Vogel told me way back last Fall to look out for him, because he seemed to have some grudge against me. I thought it was absurd then, but I've had reason to change my mind."

"The fellow has been ill-treated and ridiculed so long that he has come to look upon all men as his enemies—that's all there is to it, probably," replied the editor. "He could not have any special enmity for you personally, if you have never had anything to do with him. The poor unfortunates are in destitute condition, and have had only one person between them and starvation all through the winter. You can't imagine who that one person is."

"Am I to guess? If so, I'll take the most unimaginable person first and guess Bartley."

"Oh, no; if he had had a finger in the thing it would have been cried aloud up and down the streets of the village and spread in big type over half of his paper. But you came pretty close to the right one; it is Miss Tompkins in Bartley's office."

Ned looked incredulous.

"What could she do?" he asked. "She is only a compositor, and has her mother to support, besides the house rent to look after."

"That makes it all the more praiseworthy in the girl, and all the more blameworthy in us who left her to do

it all. I'm going out there this afternoon to see for myself how they live, and I'd like to have you with me."

Ned made no further protest, but he hoped the dwarf would be away from home when they called. He was not in fear of bodily injury. It was the unpleasantness of an unprovoked and unexplained enmity which disturbed him.

The road to Oakdale on the west led past the widow Ravenstock's cottage which stood half-concealed in a little grove of trees. Brinton had driven by time and again, but always with his mind fixed upon the farm at the end of his journey, or on affairs of personal concern. Never had he given a thought to the little cottage nor its occupants. Ned was not alone in his embarrassment as they turned in to the neglected driveway which gave access to the house. A grey-haired woman, poorly clad, bent with rheumatism and leaning on a stick, opened the door a few inches in answer to Brinton's knock. She peered suspiciously and resentfully at the two men, holding herself in readiness to close the door as soon as she could send them about their business.

"Mrs. Ravenstock, you know who I am, I suppose—Mr. Brinton, editor of *The Pioneer;* and this is Mr. Jewel, my foreman. I hope you will let us come in for a few minutes. We want to talk with you, and see if we can't do something to help you."

"I want no newspaper folks pryin' 'round here!" exclaimed the old woman in a shrill voice, her hand shaking tremblingly on the top of her cane. "Ye'd better be off an' leave me to die alone. I'm a poor woman, but this house is mine, the one thing my man left me that ain't gone, an' I can turn away from this door them that turns me away from their doors, or would if I went to them. I won't be written up, so ye'd better go."

"You are mistaken, Mrs. Ravenstock; we have not come here as newspaper men, and I shall not 'write you up'. I have just learned that you had a hard winter and that you need help. I'm ashamed to offer it so late, but I hope it will be acceptable even now."

"Well, if ye mean that, come in, though ye'll find no sofies to set on, an' nothin' much else. A hard winter —yes, ye may well say it. There's many the time I thought we'd be dead before mornin'—an' wished we would. If there's a breath in our two bodies—Percy an' me—its no thanks to anybody but the sweet angel who gave us a share of her own livin'."

The door was thrown wide open and admitted the two visitors to a scene of destitution which spoke louder than words of the sufferings the past winter must have brought. Everything that stood for comfort had been sold to provide the barest necessities. When there was nothing more to sell, the bare necessities had failed also. Then Nell Tompkins had come to their rescue. Impelled by her spirit of contrariness to take friendly notice of the persecuted dwarf and his mother, she had learned of their condition. After that her kindness of heart carried her on. Her generous support had kept them alive through the winter. This much Brinton and Ned learned. The box of groceries the editor had brought with him convinced the woman that here indeed was another friend. At Ned she looked askance. Percy had revealed to her something of his feeling for the young printer, and she hated all against whom her son had any grievance. Ned saw her attitude only too plainly. He could not understand it, and was glad when Brinton, after promising to see what could be done to better the woman's condition, took his leave. Ned was determined to do a little investigating before long on his own account to find out from Percy himself what mistaken notion he was cherishing and to

prove to him that it was without cause. Percy was only an ignorant, ill-favored humpback, but Ned much preferred his friendship to his enmity. It hurt him to think that any unfortunate person should bear him ill will, or believe him indifferent to his misfortune.

Brinton untied the horse and was about to take his seat in the wagon, but paused with his foot on the step. "I have it," he exclaimed; "why didn't I think of it before? I wonder where Percy is now. I'll give him a chance to work at Oakdale with Carroll; then he won't have to depend on charity. Just wait here a minute, Ned, while I speak to his mother."

Ned sat down on a log to wait. The plan Brinton suggested was a good one, if the dwarf wanted work; moreover it would bring him and Ned into closer contact and give the latter still better opportunities for showing his friendly spirit. Percy would have less occasion also to wander about the village keeping alive the prejudice and exciting the open hostility which had made so much trouble for him and his mother. By all means, let the poor fellow have a fair chance. Perhaps there were good qualities unsuspected in his makeup. The sound of a footfall behind him interrupted his reverie. Before he had time to rise, two great arms caught him around the waist from behind pinning his own arms to his side. The next moment he was thrown violently backward from the log to the ground, a heavy body sprang upon his breast, two brawny hands clutched his throat, and the malignant eyes of Percy Ravenstock, the hunchback, glared down into his face.

"What you doin' here—you—you—? Now I will kill you!"

The great hand tightened murderously. Ned tried to cry out, but the sound died in his throat. Ah, thank God! Someone was coming!

"See, Miss Tompkins!" cried the dwarf, gloatingly;

"I got him at last. Now I will kill him for you. He never strike you again, no more."

"Percy! stop! stop this instant! let go, quick!" screamed Nell, snatching away the hunchback's hands from Ned's throat. "My goodness! what do you mean? How dare you hurt Mr. Jewel like that?"

With a stare of astonishment, Percy slowly released his victim. "He insult you an' strike you; now I pay him back. I've been waitin' a long time," he declared, sullenly.

"Nonsense! What are you talking about? Mr. Jewel never insulted me nor struck me. Who said he did? Mr. Jewel is a friend of mine."

This was too much for the simple-minded fellow. He looked dumfounded and gazed in perplexity at the printer as he rose to his feet rubbing his neck painfully.

"Who told you any such story about Mr. Jewel?" insisted Nell.

"I heerd it in Post Office before last winter. That Farineau, he said it."

"Well, that Farineau, he lied, then!" exclaimed Nell, indignantly. "Why didn't you tell me about it? You ought to be ashamed to attack a man behind his back just because you heard somebody telling lies about him. Mr. Jewel is my friend, I tell you. Don't you ever try to harm him again. If there were more gentlemen like him in Midland it would be a good deal better for you and your mother. Now ask his pardon, this minute."

Percy hung his head, but said nothing. It was Ned who made the first advance. Evidently the hunchback had been moved by chivalrous impulses—that was something in his favor. He had been mistaken, and the mistake might have resulted seriously; but fortunately the worst had been prevented. At least Ned had an explanation now of Percy's strange behavior dur-

ing the past four or five months. The rest of the puzzle would doubtless be solved in time. Ned held out his hand to the dwarf.

"It's all right, Percy; no harm's done, thanks to Miss Tompkins' timely intervention. You made a mistake, that's all. Perhaps we'll be friends after this. Won't you shake hands?"

Percy looked at Ned sheepishly, half extended his hand, but quickly withdrew it. He could not quite bring himself to shake hands with a man whom he had just had by the throat.

"If you don't ask Mr. Jewel's pardon this minute, Percy Ravenstock, I'll never speak to you again, and you needn't come near me, either," broke in Nell, stamping her foot impatiently.

Slowly his hand was raised from his side and extended again toward Ned who grasped it warmly.

"That's enough; don't say a thing; I know you're sorry for the mistake, and we'll think no more about it," declared Ned, heartily, adding as he turned to Nell, "don't embarrass the poor fellow, Miss Tompkins; he means it all when he gives me his hand. I'm very much obliged to you, though, for interrupting a painful interview. Sh! here comes Mr. Brinton. Don't say anything about it to him. He has a job for Percy."

"Good afternoon, Miss Tompkins," said Brinton, as he recognized the girl. "I've just been visiting Mrs. Ravenstock, and I really must tell you what I think of your treatment of her and her son during the past winter. I heard of it today at Marks's store for the first time. Such generous charity is splendid, and all the more so because it has been so modestly hidden from sight. You've set us all a good example, and I, for one, mean to profit by it. You must have a very good heart."

Nell blushed uncomfortably, as she replied, "Thank

you, Mr. Brinton; but it isn't anything worth talking about, really it isn't. Please don't tell anybody else."

Ned said little during the drive back to the village. He was busy trying to harmonize conflicting theories. A letter addressed to Sam Hawkins and in Nell Tompkins' possession persistently intruded itself upon his mental vision. He could swear that it was addressed to Sam; yet Nell had denied it, and had tried to destroy the letter. The Post Office had been robbed the night before. Nell Tompkins was Bartley's confidential assistant. Bartley had in some way learned of Sam's contemplated purchase of the Hammond property and had forestalled him. Yet Bartley seemed to cherish a bitter hatred of Ned, while Nell was continually trying to prove herself friendly to him. She had shown a remarkable spirit of charity to the Ravenstocks; none could gainsay that. Well, what of it? There was, after all, no call for Ned to pry into her affairs or to try to search out her motives. She was a puzzle, but one which he, at least, was not compelled to solve. The less he had to do with women and the less they had to do with him the better he would be satisfied.

Brinton had been rather quiet, also, on the way home, but as he bade Ned good evening, after driving him to his boarding house he remarked casually, "That Tompkins girl is a queer case. I sometimes think—that—no matter what I think, I'm wrong."

CHAPTER XVI

"THERE are some trees left, thank Heaven!" exclaimed Jesse Brinton with real satisfaction, early one beautiful morning toward the end of April as he and Ned Jewel drove out from Midland and turned into the Westman road which led to Oakdale farm by the shortest route. "With all due respect to lumbermen in general and to our friend Sam Hawkins in particular, I would rather see the old trees standing in their pride and beauty than lying in a heap of saw-logs on the river's bank."

"Yes, that side of the question always appeals to me, until I reason myself away from it," replied Ned. "It seems a good deal like presumption, or even impudence, for a two-legged animal, only two or three score years old, to come along to a grand old tree that has lived a hundred, five hundred, or maybe even a thousand years, with its head proudly lifted to heaven, and by a few blows of an ax to destroy the majestic patriarch for the sake of a few dollars' worth of lumber. I read somewhere that there are redwood trees in California more than three thousand years old, that were standing there when Moses wandered with the Children of Israel through the wilderness on the other side of the globe. Just think of it! None of the mighty convulsions of nature, and none of the changing affairs of nations have disturbed these wonderful beings through scores of centuries. Imagine how transient and insignificant we men must seem to them, if only they could be conscious of us at all. I declare, it seems preposterous—a positive affront upon the dignity of the many ages which have passed respectfully over the noble heads of these ancient monarchs, for

us little transient boarders on the earth to dare to cut short such wonderful life!"

"Why, Ned, you surprise me!" declared Brinton. "I had no idea you were such a dreamer. You are worse than I am. Old Farmer Hawkins, Sam's father, would have taken you to his heart in a minute, if he could have heard you talk like that. He was the greatest lover of trees I ever knew. They were his most intimate friends and companions out there on his farm. I verily believe it took something out of his own life when he cut a grove of second-class pine for shingles the year before he died. But after all, that is only the sentimental side. How about the other side?"

"Oh, it's easy enough to come down to the practical facts of the matter," said Ned, laughing. "There wouldn't be any farm house to go to, nor any buckboard to carry us there if some of the big trees were not cut down; still, I do wish they'd leave the grand old relics of past ages, the trees that have rolled up in their mighty trunks the stories of the rise and fall of the countless nations and races of the earth. Such trees don't belong to us of the present generation. Other generations have respected them; why shouldn't we? I think they ought to be treated as perpetual legacies and passed on from generation to generation as long as the Creator who gave them such a miraculous lease of life permits them to count out the age of the world."

"I say amen to that, Ned. I guess I'll have to let you air your views in *The Pioneer*. Just see how the foliage is bursting out on those beeches and maples; and listen! the branches are choir lofts, or rather, choirs aloft, for whole choruses of singing birds. Every one of the little creatures seems trying to pour out his little heart in happiness. I confess, I feel like singing, myself, this morning. Mrs. Brinton thinks I'm getting old. To tell the truth, Ned, she has consented to the farm life, after

many years of refusal, principally because she thinks I won't die happy if the wish I have cherished so long is not granted; so she has concluded to comfort my last days by giving me the desire of my heart; but she's off her reckoning, Ned. I'm going to fool her by renewing my youth. I feel as if I am only just beginning to live. There's a verse in one of the Psalms that fits the case to a dot—no, I guess it's in Isaiah—I'm sure it is. It says, 'For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace; the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.' That's just how everything seems to me this morning. Just hear the trees clapping their hands above us in the breeze, and listen to the singing all around us. Oh, you haven't any monopoly of the sentiment and poetry of things this morning, young man. I feel like a colt turned out to grass. If you'll hold the lines a minute, I'll get out on the green sward and kick up my heels and roll—that is, if you are sure no 'old subscriber' or 'constant reader' of *The Pioneer* is looking. I hope when we move out to the farm for good next week with all our household goods, and our household goddess, that the latter will feel at least one quarter as joyful at the going forth as I shall."

Ned listened with delight to the enthusiastic unbosoming of his employer and friend. In the office and in the village Mr. Brinton, editor of *The Pioneer*, usually preserved a kindly dignity which gave little hint of the hidden fountain of youthful spirit which was now bubbling up so freely. Ned had never seen him so entirely unbend. He felt a new sense of comradeship that was inspiring.

"Mrs. Brinton is sure to be happy over the farm if it's going to make you feel like this; she can't help it when she sees the result," declared Ned.

"The result, yes, that's what we will aim for. That

reminds me of the other part of that delightful promise to men who go into the country with the right spirit and purpose. 'Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree'. I take those to be emblematic. In other words, I am to make the 'desert rejoice, and blossom as the rose'. That's what it says in another place; 'It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing'. I'm lucky in having such a man as Carroll to look after things at Oakdale while I'm away. He loves farming and will make the most of the possibilities, and his little sister is a wonder. She has never lived in the country before—has been used to city ways all her life, but she takes to farm life like—like—"

"Fleas to a dog?"

"Shame on you, Ned! I was hesitating at even so crude a simile as 'ducks to water'. Let's say like a lark to the morning sky. She gets up with a song, and goes to bed with one, and the whole day long she is making the birds envious by her happy singing. You gloomy fellow, there'll be medicine for you in the thrilling waves of harmony that float about the place. Perhaps she'll be timid for a day or two when the family moves in, but it won't last. She can no more keep that fountain of song shut up than a water kettle on a hot stove can keep the steam from escaping—there! I'm not much on comparisons myself. But singing is only an incident with Bessie, a sort of unconscious obligato to her busy hands and feet. Already she knows every horse, and cow, and calf, and dog, and lamb, and chicken as well as if she had raised the animals herself, and they all know her. You remember Dan, the clown horse I bought at auction last summer when O'Mara's circus was sold out by the sheriff in Midland? Well, Dan is as docile as a lamb with her and obeys every nod of her head and every turn of her hand. The old fellow would

follow her all over the farm like Mary's little lamb if he would be allowed to do so. Even John gets a touching up by Dan once in awhile, but he never plays any of his tricks on Bessie. She loves to be out of doors caring for the animals, or fixing her neat little kitchen garden, or arranging the flower boxes; but not a thing is left awry in the house, and she finds time to cook—well I just tell you, Ned, you have yet to taste such cooking. Mrs. Brinton used to be a very good cook, but since her strength failed so badly, she has had to leave that high art to others. You may think, after all, when you have eaten one of Bessie Carroll's dinners that there are other attractions than farming to make one 'go forth with joy' in the direction we are now taking."

"Your new housekeeper must be a paragon," said Ned, politely. He was more interested in the discussion of trees and farming plans than in lauding the virtues of a housekeeper; but the subject evidently had unusual attractions for Brinton, who continued:

"You can't imagine how pleased I am that Mrs. Brinton and Bessie take to each other. The feeling seemed to be mutual at the very first meeting, and it promises well for harmony in the household. Nothing could have happened more fortunately for us than the coming of John Carroll and his sister. I'm afraid Sam Hawkins hardly realizes how much he could do on his father's farm with such a man; but then it takes real interest and ambition on the part of the owner to get good results, even with the best of help. Sam is wise, perhaps, not to waste time and money in pursuing an occupation for which he has no liking."

"He made quite a comfortable sum from his logs this spring, didn't he?" asked Ned.

"Yes, he did very well; now he is looking for the best place to put it. I hope he won't make a mistake. He came very near to making one last Fall, it seems."

"Yes, wasn't he lucky? It was a case of the biter bit. Bartley thought he was cheating Sam out of a great treasure-trove. Instead, he cheated himself, and the poor victims who invested their money in his company. How far have they drilled now?"

"About twelve hundred feet, I believe, or nearly that. The promoter dies hard. He hears people say that it's just another of 'Bartley's bubbles' which has burst. That irritates him; but the thing that enrages him and causes him to hold on as long as there is a last chance, real or imaginary, of finding salt is the congratulations everybody delights in offering Sam, when Bartley is within hearing, on his lucky escape from buying the property. It has made him hate Sam worse than ever."

"Do you suppose Bartley really had anything to do with that Red Lampheer case that was tried last month?" asked Ned.

"I shouldn't be surprised to know that he did. His particular intimate, Farineau, worked hard to get the fellow off, and I know he was in close consultation with Bartley all the time. I know also that Bartley is acquainted with MacMurtrie & Davis, although no one else around here seemed to know them. Murray says he saw Bartley and Lampheer whispering together the very day Bartley had been up to see MacMurtrie & Davis on the Sturgeon. It was one of those things we can feel morally sure of, but which we cannot prove in a court of law. It was that way with Lampheer's trial. Everyone, even the judge and jury, was personally certain that he stole the logs, but Farineau managed to make it appear that legal proof was lacking, and so got his man off. Sam, himself, is thoroughly convinced not only that Lampheer was stealing his logs, but that Bartley had put him up to it."

Mr. Brinton and Ned were going to spend the day at the farm, the last visit before moving out the furniture.

It was Ned's first visit to Oakdale. He was to join the family there as soon as they moved in, and he was looking forward gladly to substituting a home, as he felt that would be, for his boarding house in the village. The road they were following this beautiful April morning led to the western extremity of the farm. The regular entrance to Oakdale was from the State road on the east, but nearly a mile was saved by the short cut to the west which would bring them through the pasture lot to the barns and stable before they reached the house. They had left the village and were driving at a moderate pace through the open country when the sound of quick hoof beats behind them caused Brinton to tighten his hold on the lines and draw to one side of the road. Another buckboard, painted a light yellow, came abreast of them, and the driver, a young man with prominent freckles, large mouth, long red hair, and flashy, ill-fitting clothes, made a great show of holding in his big bay gelding to prevent him from passing too quickly. Uncouth in form and feature, he had two great attractions which made it almost possible to forget the rest. A pair of honest, laughing eyes looked straight out from the homely face, and a double row of shining white teeth atoned for the immensity of his mouth. The eyes spoke of a true, manly heart; the teeth told of clean habits. At the same time the loud patterns of trousers and calico shirt, and the flaming red Windsor tie which fluttered in the breeze proclaimed the would-be sport.

"Good mornin', Mr. Brinton—mornin', Mr. Jewel. Ain't this the Jim dandy weather?"

"Good morning, Caleb. Yes, this is one of the days that make us all love the Spring. Going far?"

"Nowhere partickler; jest out for a spin. I'll give ye a brush fur's the sand ridge ef ye ain't afeerd to risk it."

"Oh, I don't know," said Brinton. "Is that gelding of

yours much of a goer? Kris hasn't a great deal of speed to boast of, but I shouldn't wonder if he might hold his own."

"I dare ye to try it!" cried Caleb. "Ef I don't run away from the nag before we git to the sand ridge, I'll git ye ten subscribers for *The Pioneer*. Go on, Rob Roy!"

Without waiting for Brinton to accept his challenge, Caleb Trimmer dashed off ahead. Brinton laughed and started in pursuit.

"Hold on there! that's not a fair start," Ned called out, but a jeering laugh from Caleb, now two carriage lengths ahead, was the only reply.

Brinton kept on without urging his horse to any great effort. He saw at once that old Kris was no match for the other horse, but he was willing to humor the jovial young sport who wanted to show off his own horse. Long before the road narrowed at the sand ridge Caleb was several hundred yards ahead.

"Two bad we haven't got Zeke," said Ned. "He wouldn't be taking anybody's dust."

"No, but think how badly Caleb would feel if his beloved Rob Roy were beaten. He will enjoy this just as much as if he had run away from a thoroughbred. Well, Caleb, you had all the speed, didn't you?" said Brinton, as they caught up with the young man a few minutes later in the sandy road on the ridge.

"Yep; ain't anything better 'an Rob Roy in these parts, I reckon. He's jest a leetle tight on the bit, an' takes some watchin', but I kin handle 'im all right; never see a horse yet I couldn't."

"Is that so? You understand all kinds of horses, I suppose?" There was a sly twinkle in Brinton's eyes as he asked the question.

"You bet! I know 'em like a book. My boss, old Rounds, leaves me to 'tend the horses he can't handle.

They ain't nothin' in horse flesh standin' on four legs in the county thet I couldn't handle at sight. It's come natural like sence I was a boy."

"Well, I'll tell you what, Caleb, I've got a horse up at my farm that I'd like to see you hitch up and drive. He's gentle as a kitten with those he knows; yet I give you fair warning that you would very likely find him too much for you."

"Pshaw! I'll bet I could drive him first time out, an' wouldn't need no introduction neither. Hain't found one yet I couldn't. They know me right off."

"Suppose you come along with us to the farm and try him. Stay to dinner, too; and if you can hitch up Dan and drive him half a mile straight away through the meadow road to the State road and back I'll make you a present of a new set of harness for Rob Roy."

The young liveryman beamed widely with pleasure. "Good enough!" he exclaimed; "thet suits me down to the ground. I'll hev Rob Roy fitted for thet harness tonight."

A few minutes later the two rigs turned into the lane which crossed the pasture diagonally from southwest to northeast, and then by another private road reached the spacious barns without announcing themselves at the house. Dave, the stableman, came out to care for the horses.

"Look out, there!" Caleb cautioned him as he approached Rob Roy. "Ye got to be jest a leetle keerful with thet horse; he's a bit tricky with strangers."

Brinton laughed and winked significantly at Ned, while Dave, heeding the warning in a hurry as he saw Rob Roy bare his teeth threateningly, ducked just in time to leave only his cap in the horse's mouth.

"By Jove; 'e's a bit wicious, ain't 'e?" exclaimed the hostler, stepping gingerly around the horse to loosen his harness.

"Where is Dan?" asked Brinton.

"'E's in the barn, sir; jes' brought 'im in; 'ad 'im out in the pasture this mornin' for a run around, an' a bite o' new grass, but the ground's too soft, an' 'e was cuttin' the sod up fearful, so I put 'im back in the stable."

"Feeling good, is he?"

"Yes, sir; fine as silk, sir."

"Well, Dave, this gentleman, Mr. Trimmer, is going to hitch Dan up for a little spin down the road and back. He's a famous horseman in these parts, and is going to show up his skill," said Brinton, with another sly wink to put the hostler on his guard.

"You don't say so!" replied Dave, staring in surprise at Caleb and grinning broadly. "'E's goin' to 'itch up Dan an' drive 'im, is 'e? Well, by Jove! 'e mus' be a good one."

Caleb began to feel a trifle mystified and uncomfortable. There was something ominous about the stableman's tone of incredulity which agreed so well with Mr. Brinton's own warning when the horse was first mentioned; but Caleb was spunky as well as conceited. He hadn't the slightest idea of backing out of his agreement.

"Where is this remarkable horse?" he asked. "Trot the critter out here. I'll drive him all right. What's to hinder? Is he ugly? does he bite or kick?"

"Not an ugly streak in him," Brinton said reassuringly. "Never knew him to hurt anyone. John Carroll's sister Bessie harnesses and drives him almost every day, and Mrs. Brinton has ridden behind him with her. He is inclined to be—er—a little erratic and playful, that's all."

"Well, what are ye all askeered of, then? Reckon I kin handle any horse what a woman kin drive," and Caleb followed the hostler into the stable. John Carroll

had just come into the barnyard, and learning what was on foot, stayed to watch the trial.

Dan was leisurely munching his hay as Dave and Caleb, followed by the others, stopped in front of his manger. He looked up indifferently, reached out his nose to one and the other as though asking for sugar, and then finding none, dropped his head again into his hay. His whole bearing was that of a rather sleepy old horse, past his prime. Dave patted him, smoothed out his mane, and turning to Caleb, said:

"'E won't 'urt ye if ye be careful. 'E's kinder sporty like, that's all. Now 'e's yours to 'itch up," and Dave showed Caleb the way to the rear of the stall, and the harness closet.

Caleb looked the horse over and gave a grunt of disgust. "What kind o' fun ye hevin' with me, anyhow?" he said to Mr. Brinton. "I thought from the way ye talked, an' the man here, thet ye had a high-stepper or suthin' heady. Ye don't mean to say I can't drive thet sleepy ol' nag! Ef I can't, I'll eat him—the hull blame carcass from his tail to his ears."

Taking the bridle on his arm, Caleb stepped up to the horse, who did not seem to notice his presence. "Whoa, Dan," he said kindly, petting the animal on his flank, at the same time essaying to enter the stall. Dan turned his dreamy eyes inquiringly toward Caleb and moved quite innocently against the nigh side of the stall.

"Stand over, Dan," said Caleb, trying to push the horse to the off side, so that he could reach in to loosen the halter, but Dan's ears went back, and his body hugged the nigh wall more tightly.

"Oh, well, I jest as soon go on the off side—all the same to me," said the young man, passing behind the horse; but Dan was there first, with his twelve hundred pounds of avoirdupois squeezed closely against the wall. The spectators on the barn floor laughed uproariously,

and Caleb grew red in the face as he sortied again to the nigh side. Dan waited an instant and lurched over just as Caleb began to pass in. The expert horseman was crowded hard against the side of the stall and squirmed out with difficulty to be greeted with another shout of heartless laughter.

"Laugh, why don't ye!" cried Caleb, trying hard to keep his temper. "What kind o' jumps do ye call thet? The blame nag hops from one side to t'other 'sif he hed corns. Mebbe I can't go in in front. The ol' plug ain't a-goin' to git the best o' me so easy."

"That's right, Caleb. Don't give in. Faint heart ne'er won a new set of harness," said Brinton, encouragingly.

Caleb went around to the front of the stall, climbed over the manger and reached for the buckle of the halter, but Dan ducked his head suddenly and reaching low down took hold of the slack of Caleb's trousers without touching his teeth to the flesh, and with a quick jerk threw him, bridle and all, down into the heap of dry bedding which had been left in the front of the stall. Then the horse stood perfectly still while Caleb scrambled out ignominiously to the barn floor, panting, and red in the face with confusion. The four men were enjoying the show hugely and offered all kinds of comforting suggestions or bits of advice.

"Climb over from the next stall and get on his back," said Jewel.

"Coax him with a lump o' sugar," suggested Carroll.

"'E don't like Cayenne pepper, Dan don't. The young gentleman might rub it on the seat of 'is brecches an' try again same way as before," remarked Dave grinning.

"Shall we hunt up Miss Bessie and ask her to harness the horse for you, Caleb?" asked Brinton.

"Darn funny, ain't it," drawled the would-be horse-

tamer, still refusing to show anger. "What good is sech a fool horse, anyhow? You git him out o' thet stall an' I'll hitch him up or bust. Don't want no gals lookin' on."

"All right, Dave, go and bring him out here, and you may as well help Caleb with the harness. If he drives him as agreed, we won't count the harnessing," said Brinton.

Accordingly, the hostler, without any objection on Dan's part, brought the animal out to the front of the barn and slipped on his harness. Caleb was surprised to see how docile and obedient he behaved, and began to feel more confident. Taking the bridle from Dave he led the horse to where his buckboard stood and backed him in between the shafts, watchful for the first sign of any unruly tricks. He also cast a furtive glance toward the farm house, rather expecting to see some laughing feminine eyes peeking out of a door or window to see his next predicament. But Dan appeared entirely reconciled to the stranger, and backed as gently into place and stood as quietly while the traces, breeching straps, and bellyband were fastened as though his own master were doing the work. Soon the check rein was up and the lines drawn through and buckled. Caleb congratulated himself that the trouble was over and that he had won. He gathered the lines in his hands and placed his foot on the step to mount his seat. In the same instant it seemed as if Old Nick himself had taken possession of the horse. He bounded away like a colt, almost throwing Caleb to the ground, but the young man sprang to his seat with real agility and braced himself firmly. He pulled on the lines, but could no more guide the horse than he could direct the course of the spring breeze which caught his hat and carried it back where the group of men were standing.

"Good for you, Caleb! That was a clever mount.

Now hold on for all you're worth," called Brinton after him.

Caleb held on. Bumpety bump they went, the buckboard spring leaping like a broncho as it hurdled stones and hummocks. Caleb tried desperately to turn the horse into the road; the big beaver meadow had more attractions for Dan, and he took his own sweet way. Round and round in a wide circle raced the horse, each lap faster than the other, while Caleb clung to the lines in grim despair.

"Whoa, there! Whoa, Dan! What's the matter with ye, ye crazy loon? Whoa, boy! Back! Back up here!"

Dan paid no more attention to the excited yells than he did to the singing of the birds in the apple trees the other side of the brook which ran between the meadow and the orchard—not as much, perhaps. He was in the circus again, and his old heart was full of the joyousnesss of youth. Dan knew he was not expected to heed his driver in the ring. He raced and galloped in an abandon of frolicsome delight. Suddenly, as he rounded toward the brook, some fancy seemed to seize him to explore the other side. He swerved from his circular path and dashed into the water. The buckboard and Caleb followed. They could not do otherwise, because the harness was strong. The brook was not more than ten feet wide, and usually less than two feet deep, but the spring rains had filled the bed to its brim with three feet of water. Splash went the floor of the buckboard and geysers spouted up between the boards. The front plowed up a fountain which poured over Caleb, drenching him to the skin, and almost blinding him besides. Still he held on to the lines like grim death. He dared not let go or jump from the buckboard for fear a worse fate would take him. Luckily the opposite bank sloped easily to the green sward of the orchard

and a wreck was avoided as the buckboard and its dripping passenger rose from their plunge. Straight in through the rows of trees Dan galloped. He seemed to have forgotten entirely that anything was hitched behind him, and Caleb expected to be dashed against a tree before another minute should pass. Something blue fluttered an instant at the end of the row; there it was again—a dress! As Dan and the buckboard went bounding headlong in the direction of the dress, Caleb saw the slight figure of a girl, bareheaded, graceful, like a bluebird flitting from tree to tree and examining the buds which were almost ready to burst into blossoms. A thrilling note of song reached his ears above the rattle and clatter of the buckboard and the beat of the horse's hoofs. Heavens! the girl had not yet seen the approaching whirlwind of horse, buckboard, and man, and now she stood right in the path. Caleb yelled to her at the top of his voice. She turned suddenly and stared at them a moment in amazement. Evidently she was paralyzed with fright, thought Caleb, and would be trampled to death before she could get out of the way. The next instant she came running straight toward the horse, utterly heedless of the imminent danger of being overwhelmed. As she came near, Dan slowed down and stopped, poking his nose down to be caressed.

"Why, Dan! What are you doing here, you bad boy? Did you run away to find Bessie? Naughty boy! Oh, sir, you're all wet!" she exclaimed, catching sight of Caleb's dripping clothes. "Did Dan take you through the brook? He's a shameless outlaw, I'm afraid, the old dear." She was stroking the horse's head lovingly to soften her reproaches, but she looked at Caleb in some embarrassment, wondering who he was and how he came to be out with Dan.

"Outlaw!" cried Caleb, jumping to the ground, "I

should say so! The pesky critter nearly done me up. Guess I'm the fool, though; guess they ain't no doubt o' thet. I told Mr. Brinton I could drive any horse in Midland County, bar none; an' he said he hed a horse he'd 'low I couldn't drive—was goin' to give me a new set o' harness if I driv him half a mile an' back on the road. I reckoned thet was easy as pie. Then he trotted out this ol' jumpin'-jack an' told me to hitch him up an' go. Here I be, after bein' mauled about in the stable, spun 'round like a pinwheel in the meadow, ducked in the crick, an' yanked through the orchard, thinkin' every minute was the last of Caleb Trimmer."

"Is that your name—Mr. Trimmer? My name is Bessie Carroll. I work for Mr. Brinton here with my brother. It's a shame to play such a trick on you. He ought to have told you that Dan was an old circus horse. It wasn't fair. But Dan wouldn't hurt anybody if he could help it. Don't you want to go back to the house now and dry your clothes? We can drive over the bridge at the end of the orchard."

"Thank ye, Miss Carroll, I'll walk back; guess I've hed enough drivin' behind thet horse. Tie him to a tree, an' I'll send the stableman after him."

"Oh, no! I'll drive him back; he always behaves with me—don't you, Dan? We're great chums. I suppose he saw me from the meadow and came over to find me." The girl sprang lightly into the buckboard and took the lines. "Come, Mr. Trimmer, don't be afraid. He won't run away again."

Caleb blushed to the roots of his red hair at hearing a slip of a girl tell him not to be afraid of a horse which she could manage so easily; but there was no use fooling himself. He had been badly worsted by at least one horse, whether by fair means or foul mattered not, and a mere girl had taken that horse and was now offering to drive him home safely. The young liveryman

looked at her sheepishly and blushed again for a different reason. "Jimminy Crickets! how pretty she is," was his sudden declaration to himself. Slender and trim of figure, with a delicate look as of the city, she had at the same time the free, vigorous movement and the rosy hue of perfect health. Her hair was a soft brown, her dark eyes were large, and clear, and deep, with the frankness of one who had nothing to conceal and no reason to be ashamed. There was also a twinkle of fun mingled with the womanly tenderness in her eyes and lurking at the corners of her pretty mouth. Caleb suddenly realized that his clothes were wet and unshapely, his hat gone, his hair in wild disorder, and his red tie hanging limp under his chin. He quickly ran his hands through his hair trying to smooth it back into place; he gave a jerk to his tie, and slapped his coat and trousers to throw off some of the water if he could. Bessie laughed.

"Oh, don't bother to fix up, now, Mr. Trimmer; wait till you get to the house. John will lend you some clothes until yours are dry. Sit right up here; I'm not afraid of a little wet."

Caleb stepped into the buckboard once more, and took his seat gingerly beside Bessie, careful to keep his wet clothes from contact with her dress. With a word to Dan, she turned the now docile old horse to the right through the trees and was very soon on the lane which took them over the bridge, along the edge of the beaver meadow and back to the barns. Before they reached the end of the trip they met Mr. Brinton, Ned, John, and Dave running to hunt for the horse-tamer and his rig. They had not seen the plunge into the brook, but they had watched the ring work in the meadow up to the time of Dan's disappearance down the slope near the brook, and fearing an accident, they had started to investigate. When they saw the bedraggled youth

being driven home by Bessie, all four men set up a howl of merriment, but Caleb had more important matters to think of than furnishing sport for the men. He made light of the adventure, and as soon as he could get John Carroll's attention and help he hurried away to make himself more presentable, leaving Bessie to tell the details and to reproach Mr. Brinton, laughingly, for playing such a trick on the poor fellow.

CHAPTER XVII

If Bessie Carroll had believed that "the surest approach to a man's heart is by way of his stomach," she could not have laid siege with more resistless ordnance to the six male hearts around her dinner table. In front was a heavy battery of corned beef, steaming and juicy, flanked by boiled cabbage, potatoes, turnips, carrots, and onions; in the rear and on the side were mortars loaded with home-made white bread, and brown bread, green onions, young and tender, just from the hot bed, pickled beets and cucumbers, creamy butter, and balls of potcheese; stationed in the distance were reinforcements consisting of pitchers of fresh sweet milk, and a jar of buttermilk, while somewhere, as yet hidden out of sight, there waited a powerful reserve force—a freezer full of Bessie's own delectable ice cream, which surely might be counted upon to complete the conquest.

Perhaps the little housekeeper would have repudiated all intention of such gastronomic conquest. What need to assault with table delights those hearts which were already hers, or which even now were flying signals of surrender? Mr. Brinton had not concealed his approval. Both he and Mrs. Brinton had made the little orphan girl feel almost like a daughter in the few months since she came to them. John, her own big, busy brother John, she knew adored her. Dave, the stableman, was her willing slave, full of respectful admiration for her command of the horses and other animals, and secretly delighting in her happy singing which made his own work easier as he caught the snatches of song first from

one part of the farm and then from another. Percy Ravenstock, who had been employed for a month at Oakdale as general assistant to John, had been, perhaps, more than any of the others, captured by appeals to his palate. His devotion to Bessie was, in part at least, the outcrying of a gratified and expectant appetite. He had existed so long on the diet of poverty garnished with charity, that the substantial fare of the farmhouse, earned, as he told himself, by his own honest labor, was a constant surprise and gratification to him. But there were other reasons for his worshipful regard of Bessie. The contrast between her kindly treatment of him and the attitude of the villagers; the fact that the dogs, the lambs, the cattle, and the birds loved her and came to her of their own accord; the witchery of her singing; and grace and self-command of her every movement, all took possession of the poor deformed boy's fancy and led him to place her in the innermost chapel of his heart with the one who, aside from his mother, had hitherto been its sole occupant—Nell Tompkins. Then there were the two new comers, Caleb Trimmer and Ned Jewel. The former made no effort to hide his admiration nor his desire to make a favorable impression. He had remained in retirement for an hour or so while his clothes dried. The suit John had lent him answered very well as a temporary convenience, but the garments did not please Caleb's sense of the artistic, nor did they seem to him to agree so well with his peculiar personal beauty as did the bright stripes and large checks of his own holiday attire. He surreptitiously persuaded Teenie, Bessie's kitchen assistant, to put an iron on the stove and smooth out his red Windsor tie and the front of his striped shirt. Then with boots shining with a new coat of blacking, face shining from soap water, and a rough towel, and hair plastered down as well as water and brush could accomplish so difficult

a task, Caleb presented himself at dinner ready to admire and be admired—if the fates should be kind. Certainly there was no need for Bessie to plan any conquest in his direction by gastronomic or other means. Only one of the male sextet remained. Ned Jewel, indeed, was the only one who evinced no particular admiration for nor interest in the pretty little housekeeper; but then she had not showed any unusual interest in him. Mr. Brinton had spoken of his young foreman several times to John and his sister, and had announced his purpose of bringing him out to live at the farm. On that account he was worth friendly notice and his share of attention, but that was all. The feast of good things could not be intended as a means of approach to his heart, even if there were reason to suppose such a plan of campaign could succeed. Doubtless, then, Bessie had prepared her dinner with the same purpose which controlled all her work—to do her very best and to give as much pleasure as she could; so she made her conquests without intending or knowing.

The shanty bell rang at a quarter before twelve. Even Percy, away in the swamps cutting black ash bean poles, heard the call and came quickly. This was one of the pleasant sounds to which his ear was sensitively attune. John and Dave came in from their work to wash up. Mr. Brinton and Ned interrupted their ramble over the farm. Caleb congratulated himself that all traces of his misadventure with Dan had been removed before the dinner assembling. As the men came into the dining room, Caleb hesitated and shifted doubtfully from one part of the room to another, watching the movements of the other men as they took their seats, but especially keeping his eye on Bessie until he made sure where she would sit; then he bounced into the chair next to her, heedless of the fact that Percy was just about to seat himself in the same chair. The force of

the collision threw Percy to the floor. Caleb rose hastily to help him up and apologize. In doing so, he backed suddenly into Teenie, who was bringing a big tureen of steaming hot soup from the kitchen. By the exercise of wonderful skill, she saved her burden from a disastrous fall, though one little scalding spoonful of soup leapt over the edge of the tureen and splashed stingingly upon the back of Caleb's neck. At the same time Teenie's equanimity went to smash.

"Mercy me! Can't you see nothin'? You near scalded the two of us to death, and spoiled the dinner in the bargain,"

"Reckon I did, Miss," admitted Caleb, ruefully, clapping one hand to the back of his neck. "Ef it's all es hot es what went down my neck, I wouldn't keer to take a bath in it. Seems to be my luck to git in the way of all the duckin's round here; fust it's cold water—then it's hot soup. Oh, I beg your pardon; didn't I say that before? Must o' kinder been s'prised into forgettin' my manners." But Teenie was already on her way back to the kitchen. She was too busy to wait for explanations.

Caleb had held fast to the chair captured at such cost, and now he seated himself. It comforted him to know that Bessie was not in the room at that moment to witness his new mishap. The laughter of the men was no worse than what he had been compelled to hear earlier in the day.

"Lucky ye warn't leanin' the other way, Caleb; ye'd have spiled that han'some necktie," said John Carroll.

"You just stop teasing Mr. Trimmer, John, or I'll box your ears," exclaimed Bessie, coming in from the kitchen. "Teenie says you got scalded with hot soup, Mr. Trimmer; I'm awful sorry, but you know it might have been worse."

"Sure, 'e might o' got the hull of it, an' that would

o' been worse for us as well as 'imself. This 'ere soup's too good to lose a drop," remarked Dave, blowing on a spoonful preparatory to swallowing the savory liquid.

Caleb blushed through his freckles at hearing Bessie speak out in his defense, but he immediately made light of the accident. "'Twan't nothin' to make sech a time about! I wouldn't o' known nothin' about it ef I hadn't heard 'em laughin'. Them's mighty fine flowers ye got there in your dress; do they grow round here so early?"

"Oh, yes, I always like to have pansies as early as I can get them. As soon as I came here I made John get me some plants from Midland for my flower boxes. They are beautiful, aren't they? I like them because they are so much like little faces, and always seem to be smiling."

"Reckon anybody'd smile to look at you, Miss Bessie," said Caleb with flattering intent. He could not imagine why everybody laughed.

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Trimmer," said Bessie, taking the will for the deed.

"Guess that would fit you, all right," broke in John. "Anybody would have smiled this morning to look at you playin' circus with Dan, and them clothes —"

"Keep still, John! Aren't you ashamed of yourself?" exclaimed Bessie. "It was a mean trick to get Mr. Trimmer to go out with Dan and then laugh at him because the horse wasn't acquainted with him. I think Mr. Trimmer did splendidly to hold him as well as he did. Anybody but a skilful driver would have been thrown out, and the buckboard might have been smashed to pieces."

"You are right, Bessie," said Mr. Brinton. "Mr. Trimmer certainly did prove himself to be a skilful and plucky horseman. It was hardly a fair test; but I was sure Dan wouldn't hurt him, and the fun was really too good to miss."

"They ain't no kinder doubt about that," admitted Caleb heartily. In the warm glow of pleasure which the praises of Bessie and Mr. Brinton brought to him, he felt willing to agree with almost anything. "I must o' looked comical hangin' on for dear life to thet ol' jumpin'-jack while he played ring-around-a-rosy all by hisself, an' took a swim in the river without waitin' for me to put on my bathin' suit; an' I kin imagine what sport the rest o' the show was for them who looked on. Reckon I'd laughed es hard es anybody ef somebody else had been the clown."

"What do you suppose possessed Dan to go through the brook?" asked Ned Jewel.

"Why, he seen Miss Bessie on the other side, o' course; wasn't thet reason enough?" replied Caleb; then he added quickly, "an' I don't blame him; I'd do the same thing myself, give me the chance."

"Not with those clothes on, I hope," replied Ned; "you wouldn't be quite as irresistible when you got to the other side as if you used the bridge."

"Humph! Say, Mr. Jewel, I'll tell you what I'll do: I'll drive that Dan horse straight on the road before you will. What'll you bet I won't?"

Ned laughed. "Perhaps you will," he said. "I'll try discretion first, and let valor come later; but I promise you I'll win him over one of these days if his affections are not too exclusive."

"Sure, 'e ain't such a terror," said Dave; "I can 'andle 'im all right; 'e on'y cuts up with strangers like he uster in the circus. Please, Miss Bessie, I'll 'ave a bit more o' that corned beef, w'ich is A.1."

"We'd have had spring lamb for dinner if Bessie hadn't found out what I was up to an' made me stop," remarked John with a teasing glance at his sister.

"Yes, you horrid thing, you wanted to take my little pet cosset and kill it, and then expect me to sit down

and help eat it! I'd starve before I'd do that." Bessie's eyes flashed, and she appealed to Mr. Brinton. "Must I put little Winnie in the oven and then eat her like a cannibal, Mr. Brinton? I raised her myself by hand, and she loves me, and I love her, and I'm the only mother she has." Tears were beginning to gather, but Mr. Brinton smiled cheerily and assured the little foster mother that she need not fear for her pet.

"When we want spring lamb for dinner we'll go to the butcher and buy somebody else's pet. That won't be so hard, because we won't know it as a pet but only as meat."

Bessie was not wholly comforted; she suspected that Mr. Brinton was slyly making fun of her. Mr. Jewel looked capable of intelligent sympathy. Her eyes met his for an instant, and she knew. He answered her unspoken question.

"If I had my way, Miss Bessie, none of the lambs, nor calves, nor birds should be murdered to make feasts for our unnatural appetites. If they must be, I want to know as little about it as possible. It makes me provoked when I think how carelessly we take away life which we have no power to bestow. It seems as if every animal ought to have a right to the life God gave it. Food in abundance is provided for man, and I can't see why it's necessary to kill in order to eat. I know I'm extreme in my views, and not wholly reasonable nor consistent, but that doesn't make me feel any more comfortable. Somebody tried to squelch me one time by quoting verses written by J. G. Holland, and they stuck in my memory but didn't satisfy me. They go like this:

"'Life evermore is fed by death
In earth, and sea, and sky;
And that a rose may breathe its breath
Something must die.

"'The falcon preys upon the finch,
The finch upon the fly;
And naught can loose the hunger-pinch
But death's wild cry.'

"That may be true enough, but then, I've been convinced against my will a good many times, and as a result I'm of the same opinion still."

Bessie listened with shining eyes and glowing cheeks, causing Caleb a pang of jealousy.

"Good! That's fine!" she exclaimed. "That's just the way I feel, only I don't know how to say it so well. I wish all men were like that."

"Well, I don't, then, beggin' your pardon, Miss Bessie," declared Dave. "We'd all 'ave to go out an' eat 'ay with the 'orses, 'cordin' to that."

"Oh, no," replied Ned, "what's the matter with baked beans and brown bread—?"

"Not much good without pork," interrupted John.

"Molasses is better in them than pork," said Ned. "And how about potatoes, and beets, and turnips, and carrots, and onions, and green peas, and fruit, and apple pie and pumpkin pie, and—?"

"Yes, an' mince pie, with the mince meat left out," interrupted John again.

"Custard pie with cocoanut beats it all hollow," answered Ned serenely. "And just think of rice pudding with raisins, and strawberry shortcake, and, and—?"

"Ice cream!" broke in Caleb, eagerly, bound to have a word on the side which Bessie had approved so warmly.

Everybody laughed at his tone and the look he cast at Bessie.

"I'll give you an extra plate of ice cream for that, Mr. Trimmer," declared Bessie.

"Oh, I'll bet he saw you makin' it," said John.

"Bread an' milk an' eggs is good 'nough for me," murmured Percy, unconsciously passing his plate for another big helping of corned beef.

"Oh, you! you'd eat anything you could get your teeth into, you pig!" exclaimed Teenie, who always insisted that Percy would eat them out of house and home if left to his own way.

"You are all of you right," said Mr. Brinton, at last. "There's no doubt that we eat more meat than is good for us, and not enough of the fruit of the ground; but it's well to remember that every living thing, animals as well as men and women, has a mission to fulfill. Nothing lives for itself alone. Our mission is to be useful to someone else in the way for which we are best suited; and many a beast and fowl and fish lives but to die in order that, by dying, it may help some other animal to live. Nothing is nobler than sacrifice for the welfare of others. In that respect the gentle sheep and cattle share in one of the highest privileges given to man—the privilege of being spent to enrich and sustain the human race."

This seemed too much like preaching to call for further discussion, and the majority of those at the table felt that the subject was getting beyond their depth; but John, after a moment's consideration, thought to clinch his side of the question with one more practical argument:

"I'd like to see the farm ye could run without killin' something now an' then. I reckon I'll do es much es the next fellow to make animals feel good, but a farm's no good if ye don't raise your own meat."

"I'd like to see such a farm myself, and what is more I'd like to run such a farm," said Jewel.

"So would I!" exclaimed Bessie, with enthusiasm. "I'm sure it could be done, too. All the animals should be our friends and helpers, and there would be love and

understanding between them and us, and we wouldn't prowl around with knives and clubs to murder our friends, would we, Mr. Jewel?"

"No, indeed, we wouldn't!" agreed Ned, and then both he and Bessie blushed furiously as a roar of laughter showed them the awkward interpretation which had been placed upon their sympathetic declarations.

"Humph!" grunted Caleb indignantly. "She didn't mean nothin'. I bet I could run such a farm as good as anybody ef I had the right kind of a—somebody to help me," which made the matter still worse.

"You were out in the swamp this morning cutting bean poles, were you, Percy?" said Mr. Brinton, thinking it well to change the subject. "How many did you cut?"

"Don't know—whole lot—guess twenty or thirty, maybe," said Percy, nervously fingering a huge slice of brown bread and butter. It suddenly occurred to him that John had berated him severely for accomplishing so little.

"He ought to cut five times as many," declared the foreman. "He gits a-dreamin' an' wanderin' through the woods, lookin' up into the trees, an' listenin' to the birds singin' till he forgits all about bean poles."

"Percy ain't like you, John Carroll," said Bessie, warmly. "He'd more like—" she glanced at Ned and stopped suddenly, flushing hotly, and then went on hastily, "more like me. He loves the woods and the birds, and finds them better companions than a good many people. You needn't scold him; I won't have it."

John shrugged his shoulders and smiled grimly at Mr. Brinton. He was used to the tyranny of his pretty sister and made little effort to resist it. Percy gazed at his defender adoringly and helped himself to another glass of milk.

"More likely 'e were listenin' to the singin' of a bird with a blue dress; that's w'at I likes to 'ear, be it in the woods, or in the 'ouse," declared Dave gallantly.

"Miss Bessie's a bird—thought I heard her up in the tree this mornin'—went to look, but couldn't find her," admitted Percy.

"Miss Bessie's a darn sight prettier than any bird I ever seen," declared Caleb, determined to keep in the front rank with compliments; somehow it seemed to him the others were trespassing on privileges which he had chosen for himself.

"Nonsense, Mr. Trimmer, you're a rank flatterer," laughed the girl.

"There is one thing certain," said Mr. Brinton, "you all seem to enjoy life at Oakdale and enter into the spirit of the place splendidly. I hope Mrs. Brinton will be as happy when she comes out here next week. Ned, I'm sure of you already. You have been a revelation to me today. I can't help wishing our friend Sam Hawkins had more of your tastes. He and his dear little wife Lettie would have been very happy on his father's farm if he could have made up his mind to it. I know nothing would have suited her better; but, there, I mustn't keep blaming the boy because he isn't cast in the same mold as we are. He means well and is determined to make the best use of his life according to his views of what he ought to do, and Lettie finds her chief pleasure in helping him to do it, so there is every reason to believe that they will be happy in their new home in Midland."

"Have they moved down already?" asked John.

"Yes, Sam sold his farm last week to an eastern man, and they have taken a house in Midland."

"Too bad! The Hawkins farm has the makin's of a fine place. Funny how different folks is. I'd feel like a fish out o' water anywhere but on a farm," said John.

"It's the real life, isn't it? the life of the producer,

the life free from the cramped stinginess and the fraud and extravagance of the city," assented Ned.

"Wall, by ginger! the city would suit me a darn sight better than any farm thet ever was. I want to be where they's some sport an' excitement," was Caleb's hasty assertion, but when he heard Bessie declare emphatically that she was glad to get away from the hard, noisy, selfish, cruel city to such a beautiful place as Oakdale, and that she would never go back to the city again, Caleb felt like biting his tongue off, and made haste to add that "of course some farms was different, an' some farmers might be better than city folks, an' like enough he could git used to farmin' ef he could pick an' choose the folks to live with him."

"Sure, an' where will ye find more sport an' excitement than we 'ad 'ere this mornin'?" asked Dave, grinning; whereupon another laugh made Caleb feel that he had "put his foot in it" again.

"Never mind, Caleb," said Mr. Brinton, "you can congratulate yourself that you have done us all a kindness in furnishing sport where another might have spoiled everything by being angry. I doubt if there are many men in Midland who would have preserved their good nature as perfectly as you did under such trying circumstances. That's the only right way to take a joke, and we shall all like you the better for it. As for farming, I don't doubt that you would make a first class farmer if you set about it and had, as you say, good helpers. Farming, certainly, is one of the highest, most dignified pursuits. Our friend Horace Greely, who ought to have been elected President last year, said he regarded farming as the vocation which conduces most directly to a reverence for honesty and truth, because the young farmer, acting *as* a farmer, must realize that his success depends upon his absolute truthfulness and integrity. The lawyer, the doctor, the

merchant, even the preacher, may sometimes feel impelled to resort to trickery or insincerity to earn his income; but the farmer must deal directly with Nature, who never was and never will be cheated. The farmer's calling, in Greely's opinion, is the one most conducive to thorough manliness of character. I haven't got his exact words, but that is his thought, and he is right. The great Daniel Webster was even more emphatic. He said that the farmers are the founders of all civilization. You can depend upon it, Caleb, that the American farmers have done more to build up the greatness of this big nation than all the other classes, even including the soldiers, combined."

"By the way, Mr. Brinton," said Bessie; "couldn't you have Mr. and Mrs. Hawkins up here some time? I'd like to see Mrs. Hawkins; she must be nice, from what you say."

"Certainly! Just as soon as we get moved in and settled a bit, Sam and Lettie shall come, not once but often. I believe Mrs. Brinton has already asked them." An eloquent look from Caleb prompted him to add, "and of course this will not be your last visit to Oakdale, Caleb. You must drive out this way often when Rounds can spare you."

Teenie had slipped out of the room at a nod from Bessie. In a few minutes she returned with a large platter loaded with heaping saucers of ice cream, a special treat in honor of Mr. Brinton and his two guests. Ice cream was an almost unheard of luxury in that region. Bessie had brought the accomplishment of making it from the East and had persuaded Mr. Brinton to buy her a freezer. This was her first performance for the season, and it formed the crowning triumph of a masterly dinner. Caleb was loud in his praise, and claimed the promised second plateful, whereupon a general clamor went up against such partiality, and Teenie

was sent to the dairy cellar to scrape the freezer clean that all might have their fill.

Then without ceremony and without delay the jovial and satisfied dining room gathering broke up and each returned to the appointed work for the afternoon. Mr. Brinton and Ned after another short ramble about the farm went to the stable to hitch up Kris, while Caleb, finding no plausible excuse to linger behind them, followed reluctantly and relieved the stableman of the restless Rob Roy.

Ned Jewel occupied a small room in a boarding house not far from *The Pioneer* office. When he opened his door on his return from Oakdale that afternoon, he paused on the threshold a moment and looked around with a strange sense of loneliness. The room seemed ugly and desolate. He had not noticed before how small and gloomy it was—not a gleam of brightness anywhere. Stop! a bit of something blue caught his eye. He picked up a newspaper which lay on his bureau half covering a small picture in a blue plush frame. Blue! that's what Dan saw away off in the orchard; that's the color which brightened the dinner at Brinton's farm. Ned hid the picture out of sight, hastily, in the top drawer, but as he did so a merry, rippling laugh seemed to echo through the room. He snatched up the newspaper and rustled it impatiently an instant, then he sat down on the edge of the bed and tried to whistle. The room smelled close and stuffy. He rose and threw up the window. It was not quite evening. Why hadn't he stayed at *The Pioneer* office until supper time? The day was so far spent when they came back to the village that Brinton had said it wasn't worth while to go to the office; but it would be better to wait there for an hour and occupy the time with work than to sit here alone. A flutter of wings passed near by. Presently

a burst of song came from the tree nearest to his window. He looked in the direction of the song and saw on the tip of a swaying branch—a bluebird. With an unacknowledged feeling of annoyance he turned away from the window, put on his hat again and went out to walk until time for supper. Thank heaven, he would soon quit the dingy boarding house for good! In another week—he counted the days—yes, in less than a week he was going to Oakdale to live—to Oakdale—and to—. He squared his shoulders with a sudden jerk, and set his teeth together. He might be a fool, he told himself, but he was no scoundrel nor coward. What business had he with anything but the past and the present? The future held nothing of hope nor joy for him. He must remember that and govern himself accordingly—yes govern himself with a rod of iron if necessary.

CHAPTER XVIII

All a-flutter with happy importance and preparation, Bessie tripped gaily in and out of the house and from room to room like a sunbeam set to music. All the day before and from early morning on this great day she had been putting the finishing touches on the welcome which farm house, and lawn, and garden, and the little housekeeper herself were now ready to give to the family who would arrive before dinner. Already a considerable portion of the furniture, together with the carpets, had been sent ahead, and they were all in place. Bessie was determined that the final moving in should not be a scene of confusion, but should be as much as possible like a home coming. A clean white cloth covered the dining room table on which stood two big bowls of violets fresh from the woods. Eight places were set, and at each place, in the smallest cup she could find, Bessie had put three or four long-stemmed pansy blossoms in water, with a larger bunch for Mrs. Brinton. They were her choicest offering. The little witch knew that the men, especially, would prize these precious blossoms which were always guarded so jealously, and which had never on any account been plucked or handled by anyone but Bessie herself.

As the forenoon advanced, the impatient little woman ran to the gate at every sound of wheels, and often when there was no sound, to "see if they're coming." Mr. and Mrs. Brinton arrived in the buckboard ahead of the first load of furniture soon after eleven o'clock. Bessie, excited and eager, took possession of the quiet, motherly woman at once and insisted that she should lie down and rest until dinner time.

"I'm so glad you've come, Mrs. Brinton. It will be ever so much nicer here now; but you must take it easy and let me do the work."

Mrs. Brinton noted the tidy, prettily arranged door yard garden and the flower boxes on the piazza. She saw with quick approval the cleanliness and taste exhibited in parlor, sitting room, dining room, and kitchen, even with the incomplete furnishings; then she sank into the covered rocking chair with a sigh of weariness and content mingled in somewhat uncertain proportions.

"You seem to have everything under perfect control here, Bessie. I can't see a speck of dirt anywhere. It all looks very nice and homelike. I really don't see that you need me here at all."

"Oh, Mrs. Brinton. Don't say that! It's all for you, every bit of it, and we need you here more than anybody else. It wouldn't be home without you. Now you must tell me just how you want me to do things and I will do them so."

Mrs. Brinton drew the rosy little brown-eyed girl to her and kissed her affectionately. "You're a good girl, Bessie, and I am well satisfied to have you do things in your own way, because I can see it is a good way. If I had a daughter of my own I should want her to be just about like you. I haven't any daughter, and you haven't a mother, dear, so we must be helpful and comforting to each other."

Bessie threw her arms around Mrs. Brinton's neck, tearful but happy. "I'm so glad you like me, Mrs. Brinton! I do want you to like me. I love it here on the farm, and I'm going to love you, too, if you will let me."

Mr. Brinton bustled in. "The first load is here. I'm going to have the team unhitched and put into the stable. We can unload after dinner. Ned will be here

very soon with the other load. Hello! Bessie—tears? What's the meaning of this? Your cruel mistress hasn't been scolding you already, has she?"

"She isn't a cruel mistress at all," cried Bessie, pouting her red lips saucily at Mr. Brinton; "she's a dear, sweet, kind, gentle little—*mother*, that's what she is!" and then, almost frightened at her own temerity in using such a sacred word as though it were her right, she flashed one hungry, yearning look at Mrs. Brinton and ran out of the room without waiting for a word of reply.

Sunday afternoon, the fourth of May, brought Ned Jewel his first opportunity for more than a table acquaintance with Mr. Brinton's unusual little housekeeper. The opportunity came unsought. If anything, he had avoided Bessie during the few days immediately following his arrival at Oakdale as a member of the household. After an early breakfast each morning he drove to Midland with the editor, and the short evening after supper was spent in becoming familiar with the immediate surroundings of the farmhouse and barns. At such times the routine duties of the house kept Bessie busily engaged. During the brief meetings at breakfast and supper, however, Ned was given many glimses of a winsome character in which were combined the frank innocence and gayety of a child with the good judgment, earnestness of purpose, and deep sympathy of a woman. He found it impossible to regard her as "help." She seemed, altogether, like one of the inner family circle, and was so treated by both Mr. and Mrs. Brinton. Even Teenie, as well as the hired men, always spoke of her as "Miss Bessie."

One fact slowly forced itself into Ned's consciousness; certain reckless views which he had held, and which he had more than once expressed, required modification. There must be exceptions, after all, to the rules he had

unhesitatingly applied to all women. He could not make them fit Bessie Carroll. This fact gave him some inward annoyance, but he feared it was not to be the worst of his troubles. It surprised him to find how many of his own strongest likes and prejudices were shared by the little brown and red mistress of the blue dress. She had no self-conscious modesty which prevented her from speaking freely to him, and she seemed to enjoy leading the table conversations to such subjects as trees, animals, farm life, the hunting of song birds, and other matters likely to provoke him to the expression of his earnest opinions. In these conversations she joined with an intelligence as refreshing as was her enthusiasm.

But Sunday afternoon Ned would be free from hurry and work, and Bessie, full of artless longing for someone to sympathize with her in her devotions at the shrine of Nature, suggested a ramble through the woods in search of wild flowers for the tea-table. Perhaps Mr. Jewel had not seen the old beaver dam nor the big "strawberry glen." If so, they might be considered the objective points of interest. The young man accepted gladly, but with some misgivings which he could not stifle nor explain. An alluring sense of risk tempted him. There was no wrong, only danger, in such a ramble. Both practice and knowledge of himself would give him the necessary self-control. Why should he forego an indulgence, as innocent as it would be pleasant, through fear of what might happen if he were less awake to realities? He held the reins—he would continue to hold them. But there had been gloom and loneliness long enough in his life. It was time to admit a little of the brightness and companionship so freely offered.

The day was one of enchantment. The sparkling eyes and glowing cheeks of the transplanted city girl showed

that she was under its spell—more than that, they made a part of the enchantment. She had explored the mystic land of beauty and learned some of its secrets. Now she was taking another who could see and feel the things she had been compelled before to enjoy alone. Sharing her delights doubled them and caused her joyous spirits to bubble over in song and laughter as she led the new initiate away from the farm house into paths of her own choosing. Ned yielded unconsciously to the contagion of her exuberance and to the spell of the exquisite day.

At the western boundary of Oakdale a sandy ridge of some prominence followed the line of the road in a loose sort of way, advancing and receding, and serrated with depressions caused by little water-courses. Along the base of this ridge for some distance lay the sweet and flowery mild meadow and the greenwood, a patch of forest which had escaped the devastating fires of two years earlier. The meadow and the forest seemed to coquette with each other, crowding and yielding, turning to one side, encircling, embracing—sometimes the meadows, but never the forest, being lost to view. It was to this part of the farm that Bessie and Ned turned their steps, over the fresh green carpet of new grass sprinkled with violets.

"This is what I was born for; this is where I am at home!" exclaimed Bessie, stretching out her arms to field and sky as though she would take the whole landscape into her embrace. "Just think how long I've been imprisoned in the city and didn't know what I was losing."

"And just think how many there still are who don't know, and who even imagine the city is the most delightful place on earth," replied Ned.

"Yes, but I suppose some of them do know and would be glad to get away if they could, poor things. It isn't

everybody who can break away from city life, you know."

"Of course not. Did you ever watch little chicks coming from their shell at hatching time? You know how the chick is shut up tight in its tiny apartment which just suits it for a while. At length, however, an impulse comes to seek freedom and a wider domain. It isn't easy to change; something must give way, and there's a hard struggle for the little chick before it can escape from its prison. But outside is a big beautiful world of green grass, and sunlight, and the inviting soil to dig in, and cool water, and freedom. The little chick has aspirations, and its strength is exerted to break out from its prison home and reach the world of life and beauty for which it feels it was made. Without the struggle, and the breaking of the shell which confines it, the chick would never reach its goal. It would stay in its shell until it died. I can't help thinking that some city people are like the little chick. They are shut up in the shell of city walls, and paved streets, and are crowded into narrow apartments, with only a little air cell at one end of their house to help them to breathe. They call this air cell the back yard, but often it isn't big enough to be of much use. They live a cramped, stifling life in their shell, and a good many of them die there without ever getting out into the big beautiful world. But now and then one of them makes a struggle and breaks the shell and wins the way to freedom like this. Sometimes the shell is hard, and it takes a good deal of breaking to get out, but it's worth all the trouble."

"Isn't it, though!" cried Bessie. There was real exultation in her voice. "And who ever heard of a chick, once free, who would go back to its shell? I know I wouldn't go back to mine."

"I should hope not!" Ned hardly realized what fervor

he put into his remark, and fortunately he did not see the added tint of rosy color which glowed in his companion's face for a moment.

"Did you ever see a more delicious day? Everything is so fresh and sweet," said Bessie.

"No, I never did, for the very good reason that there couldn't be a more delicious day. You may say as often as you please 'what so rare as a day in June?' but a day like this in early May is more 'rare' than the most perfect day in June. The grass and the foliage have that tender, delicate freshness and that brilliancy which comes only at this time of year. Everything is brand new, and nothing has had time to become scarred, or wilted, or dust laden. Death begins so soon, that even in June many of the sweetest flowers of Spring are gone. Now the world is like a fresh opened flower in the cool of the morning, with the dew still on its petals. Later, it will be the full blown, gorgeous blossom, but then it will be in the heat of the midday, and its petals will begin to curl on the edges, the sun will dry up the moisture, the fragrance will grow less delicate, the dust will mar the velvety leaf, and the time for fading will be near. Who wouldn't choose the dainty, dewy, half-opened rose bud, with half of its beauty revealed, while the other half is modestly concealed within, rather than the wide open blossom which can promise nothing more than it displays, and which will soon scatter its petals on the ground?"

"Do you write poetry, Mr. Jewel?" asked Bessie tipping her head saucily to one side, and looking at him out of the corners of her eyes.

"Why, no!"

"Well, you ought to, then. I should think you would, and get Mr. Brinton to print it in *The Pioneer*. I believe he'd do anything for you."

Ned laughed heartily. "You think he'd do even that

for me, do you? I had no idea he thought so much of me as that. But it's cruel of you to make fun of me, Miss Bessie."

"I didn't mean it that way; but I agree—partly—with what you were saying. May is my favorite month of all the year—today, and it will be until I go to bed on the evening of the thirty-first; then for thirty days June will be my favorite month; after that it will be July, and so on. I like every month best as it comes. To me May is most delightful for what it promises. If every month were May, it would lose half its charm, because we would be always having promises without the fulfillment. There are too many real folks like that."

"I see you're not too much of a Nature lover to be practical as well," remarked Ned.

They had entered the woods lying on the east of the beaver meadow which extended to the western sand ridge. All was cool and moist. The new foliage was just beginning to drape the bare limbs of the trees, and the delicate green made a vivid contrast of color with the dark trunks and branches. Little dancing sun rays peeped through the tree tops. The fragrant breath of the woodland perfumed the still air. Bessie was full of the fascination and mystery of the woods. Like a wood sprite herself, she stepped daintily and softly, as though to steal unawares upon some of their vernal secrets. Her eyes searched the ground, the trees, the shrubs, with the alertness and excitement of an explorer or hunter for treasure. Now and again she pounced with a little cry of delight on some discovered trophy of Spring. Ned loved the woods, and he, too, was responsive to their charms, but more than once he caught himself watching his companion with so much pleasure that he almost forgot his surroundings. Once a quick cry startled him.

"Oh, Mr. Jewel, look out! step back!"

He stepped back more in perplexity than alarm.

"You cruel thing! You nearly stepped right on it—see, a dear little white violet!"

Ned laughed in some embarrassment. "I thought it must be a snake, or a bird's nest, or something," he said.

"Well, it *is* something. Where are your eyes? See if you can't find more of them."

"More eyes? I suppose I ought to have them in my feet so as to avoid stepping on the violets."

"Don't talk like that, Mr. Jewel; it sounds too much like John. He always jokes and makes fun of me when I go into rhapsodies over a flower."

"What a wicked man!"

"He is not! He's a dear; and he adores me; but he don't understand me nor agree with me enough. I thought you were different."

A reply sprang to Ned's lips, but he stopped suddenly and changed the subject.

"Where is that beaver-dam you are going to show me? You have your basket nearly full of flowers already."

"It's just below the junction of the beaver-meadow brook and the brook on the north side of the ridge, in a little valley. We'll be there in a few minutes."

From the point where the two little meadow brooks unite, well defined banks begin to appear, the miniature valley grows narrow, and a not inconsiderable stream continues through the woods in a northwesterly direction, leaving the farm at the corner farthest from the dwelling and barns. Ned had not penetrated to this extreme part of Oakdale in his walks with Mr. Brinton. Now he found much to interest him in the many evidences that some time in the past a colony of beavers had exercised undisputed sovereignty over the region.

Water-courses and remains of other works of theirs were visible on every hand. Bessie ran on ahead as they approached the stream at the point she had mentioned.

"Here is the dam; isn't it wonderful!" she exclaimed.

"Well, I should say so! It looks like man's work," was Ned's comment.

The structure was remarkably well preserved, a log and brushwood dam nearly twenty feet long, from bank to bank, and holding back a body of water four or five feet deep.

"See how the clever little creatures gnawed through the tree trunks to make them fall across the brook just where they wanted them," cried Bessie, "And see how they twisted small branches and sticks in between the logs to catch the drift wood and soil which would fill up the spaces and make it watertight."

"Yes, their ingenuity is wonderful—or their sagacity, cunning, or instinct. Whatever it should be called, it is far ahead of the intellect, or reason, of some men as a guide to good work. I can see now why Mr. Brinton calls the lowland along this brook the beaver-meadow. It is very appropriate. At first, I was puzzled to know where the name came from."

"That's right; Mr. Brinton says the industrious, social, courageous little things deserve to be honored and remembered, so he named the meadow after them. But they lived here many years ago. In some of the little drains they dug all over the flat lands, to let the water into the brook I've seen big trees growing."

"You are remarkably well acquainted with the region for one who has lived here so short a time."

Bessie laughed and then sighed. "It seems as if I had been here for years. I think I never really lived until I came to Oakdale. It's the first place that has felt anything like home since I was a little girl."

"Your father and mother—?" Ned hesitated whether to complete the question.

"They both died nearly ten years ago."

"Strange coincident," murmured Ned. "My own parents died when I was a small boy."

Surprise and sympathy shone for a moment in Bessie's eyes as she thought over the matter. Then she said gently, "That makes us sort of twin orphans, doesn't it? We'll have to take Dame Nature as our foster-mother."

Ned was conscious of a warm flush mounting his cheeks. He stooped nervously to pluck the blossom of a wood anemone near his feet. His pulse was beating uncomfortably. What a queer notion this was of Bessie's, and how deliciously, how embarrassingly intimate it made him. He could not laugh at her remark. Somehow it seemed too sacred a matter for joking. "She will be a beautiful mother," was all he said; then he threw a stick of wood into the water and watched the ripples spread in widening circles to the banks. Bessie watched them, too. Suddenly an idea occurred to her.

"I believe I could walk across that dam to the other side. I'm going to try it."

"I wouldn't," urged Ned. "It looks almost ready to break, there in the middle."

Bessie had her foot on the end of a log, and tried its strength. "See; it holds firm. I'll skip across; and you can follow if you dare. Maybe you're afraid of a ducking like Mr. Trimmer."

With a gay laugh, she stepped out upon the dam. It swayed and bent a little, but held fast. She took another step, and another. When almost to the middle, some of the small sticks which held the structure together snapped, and the log on which she was standing began to sink. With a little cry, the girl tried to retreat, but succeeded only in returning part of the

way. It was all she could do to maintain her balance. Ned was on the end of the dam reaching out his hand to her. By an effort she grasped his fingers and sprang back to the bank.

"My! I came near to getting the ducking myself," she exclaimed, laughing and rosy.

Ned was trembling with an uncontrollable emotion. The clasp of those warm, clinging fingers upon his own set his heart fluttering again. It angered him, when he realized it was so. What a weakling he must be! Where was all of his boasted self-control? It was absolutely unthinkable that he should go to pieces like this. The indulgence he had told himself was innocent was proving more dangerous than he supposed. A continuation of it might easily become criminal. And yet—. These thoughts flashed, only half-formulated, through his mind. He interrupted them impatiently by hurling a heavy stick with all his force into the brook. It struck half against the dam and half against the water with a splash that spattered both him and Bessie with the drops.

"You needn't scold the dam, Mr. Jewel; it wasn't its fault," exclaimed Bessie. "That's like John. If he hits his thumb with a hammer, he vents his spite on the poor hammer."

"Hadn't we better go on the strawberry patch you were going to show me? It's getting late," said Ned irrelevantly.

"The idea! I don't believe it's three o'clock. You're not tired of the woods already, are you?"

"No, indeed, not in the least! I was only thinking of you," explained Ned with more haste than reason.

Without further protest, though somewhat perplexed by Ned's manner, Bessie led the way through a grove of white birch trees, over the east ridge, crowned with great Norway pines, tall and straight, and past the

beech and maple ridge until they reached the wonderful "strawberry glen," one of the most delightful sections of the farm. There, in a patch of four or five acres of undergrowth, wild strawberries of surpassing size and flavor could be picked in abundance every year. Even now, the fresh, vigorous vines were beginning to blossom.

"Of course I can't tell you much about the strawberries except what I've heard; but in a few weeks from now I'll find out all about them for myself. Everybody tells me this is the finest strawberry patch in the county. Do you like strawberry shortcake, Mr. Jewel?"

"What civilized being could answer anything but an emphatic 'yes' to that question? I must confess to the prevailing weakness."

"Prepare for a continuous performance of strawberry shortcake, then, for breakfast, dinner, and supper, with strawberry ice cream as a special understudy for high days and holidays."

"Dear me! You're going to kill us with kindness, are you? I suppose we can have a few potatoes and a little taste of bread and butter for dessert, can't we?"

"Don't be ungrateful, but take what's set before you, asking no questions," was Bessie's pert reply.

Ned glanced at the roguish face and trim figure beside him, then he turned away quickly. "We can't always do that," he said. "Sometimes the most tempting and delicious dainties are forbidden to us by the severe rules of—our diet."

"Oh! I hope you're not a dyspeptic, Mr. Jewel?"

"No, not exactly; but—well, some things are not good for me. Strawberry shortcake is not one of them, however."

The afternoon was nearly over when the two young people walked leisurely through the meadow at the back of the barns and came around to the house, laden with

wild flowers. The first object which caught their eyes was a yellow buckboard standing in the yard, the horse having been unhitched and stabled.

"Mr. Trimmer must be here; that's his buckboard!" exclaimed Bessie.

As she spoke Caleb, who had been watching at the parlor window, came hurrying out upon the piazza. He looked discontented enough, and shot a comical glance of resentment at Ned; but otherwise, his greeting was characteristically frank and jovial.

"How are ye, Miss Bessie? I've been waitin' here for ye more'n two hours. Hanged ef it ain't jest my pesky luck to call on a gal an' find her off gallivantin' with another feller."

"Why, good afternoon, Mr. Trimmer. I'm sorry you had to wait so long; but how could I know you were coming this afternoon? You didn't tell me. But you'll have to stay to supper, now."

With a nod and short word of recognition to Caleb, who responded in like manner, Ned Jewel slipped away as Bessie conducted her caller again into the house. During supper Mr. Brinton noticed that the young printer joined less in the conversation than he had done at any time since coming to Oakdale. When asked how he enjoyed his afternoon ramble he declared that it had been a great treat to him, but said nothing more. Caleb on the contrary, had forgotten his pique and monopolized a large part of the conversation. After the meal was over and the family gathered around the melodeon for an hour of singing, Ned's rich baritone voice was missing. No one knew where he had gone. Somewhere out on the State road east of the farm he was walking alone. He had come face to face with a serious question, the answer to which he knew perfectly well, but the knowledge did not make his position easier. A thing was threatening, if indeed it had not already come to

pass, which he had told himself was impossible. It was a thing to be dreaded, to be avoided, to be prevented at all costs. There could be no two sides to the question; yet he rebelled against the inevitable—and blamed himself bitterly for rebelling. In all his relationships, business and personal, he believed he had been persistently true and honorable. He would not admit for an instant that he could fail in this respect now. That the temptation was unexpected and strong made no difference except that the means taken to resist it, or escape it, must be immediate and effective. The hurt he would suffer was not to be considered at all. But why need he look for means to escape? Up in the farm house at this very moment he knew there was an honest, simple-minded, generous young liveryman, somewhat uncouth, but with a true, manly heart, who was basking in the smiles of two frank, roguish, womanly eyes into whose depths Ned must not dare to gaze. There could be no doubt whatever of Caleb's infatuation for Bessie. It was patent to everyone in the house. Ned shrank from so desperate a remedy, never doubting its effectiveness if left to its natural development without interference. Then, realizing the imperative need for his own effacement, he accepted the remedy as providential and tried to welcome the coming of Caleb.

CHAPTER XIX

While Ned was doing battle with his secret trouble and temptation, others were considering his affairs in quite a different way. The editor of *Chips* found himself confronted with threatening disaster and humiliation in connection with his salt speculation. The loss of money invested by his stockholders did not bother him in the least; but he had some of his own money tied up in the enterprise, and was alarmed at the prospect of losing it. He must certainly get clear himself before the impending crash. The most disagreeable element in the whole situation, however, was the fact that after tricking Sam Hawkins out of the property he was in a fair way of demonstrating to the people of Midland that he had really tricked himself and had saved Sam from loss. This was too bitter a pill for Bartley to swallow. Some way, no matter how desperate, must be found to escape the seemingly inevitable. He had spent days in the search of an expedient. Like an inspiration from the devil came a thought of Ned Jewel. Quickly his mind ran over the possibilities, and, in the first leap of his imagination, exaggerated them. He would need help, and Nell Tompkins was the very person to press into service. He persuaded her to drive with him out to the Hammond property Sunday afternoon ostensibly to see what progress had been made in drilling for salt. Then he explained his desperate extremity and appealed to her to suggest some scheme for relieving the situation.

"You are so remarkably clever, Nell; I'd be willing to bet you can hit upon the right idea, just as you have done before."

"Oh, you would! Well, don't be too sure, Bart. I can't always be caught with taffy, and what's more to the point, I don't want to be mixed up in any more schemes unless they're honest."

"Oh, pshaw! what put such a notion into your head? There's no time to bother with Sunday School nonsense when you have serious business on hand."

"'Tisn't my business. It may be serious to you; but I don't have to meddle with it if I don't want to; and from what you say, I guess I don't want to."

"Of course you do; you'll get your share of the profits as usual, and the size of your share will depend upon how clever you are in doing the work."

"And what if I refuse to do any of the work?"

"I don't count on any such emergency, my dear. It's too late in the day for you to balk at trifles after helping to work up that Gladwin County donation scheme, and suggesting the Kibby affair, and fighting for your share in the Fournier—"

"That's enough, Bart! You needn't throw those things in my face. What is it you want me to do?"

"That's right, let's stop beating about the bush and get down to business. I have a little plan, but I thought you might suggest something a good deal better if you would set your wits to work."

"Well, I can't; so count me out."

"You mean you won't, I suppose?" Bartley was growing impatient.

"Have it that way if you like; it amounts to the same thing in the end."

"Very well, my dear; then we'll have to try my scheme, and you'll have to help."

"I'll do as I please about that. You'd better let me hear what it is first," snapped Nell. A positive distaste for Bartley's affairs and rebellion against his dictation had been growing in the girl for the past few months.

She wished to cut loose from them, but could not see how she was to do so. She was in constant fear that he would entangle her beyond escape if she submitted; and a restless desire for something better in her life was urging her on to an open break with her employer.

Cautiously, Bartley began to hint at the plan he had formed. As yet, he had no suspicion of Nell's real state of mind, and regarded her objections as nothing more than the usual play for advantage, or the petty contrariness of a spoiled girl. Still, he had some inkling of her interest in Ned, and so was careful not to tell too much at first.

Nell listened to his astonishing revelations and equally astonishing proposal with mingled feelings of amazement, disbelief, and indignation. Bartley, watching her narrowly, knew by her telltale cheeks, alternately flushing and paling, and by the angry, hurt look in her eyes, that help from her was not to be hoped for, and he veered away from the truth more and more in the effort to turn her sympathies from Ned.

"Bill Bartley, you're a worse scoundrel than I thought you were!" she exclaimed, when he paused in his recital. "I certainly won't have anything to do with such a villainous scheme—not for a minute; and you shan't, either; I won't let you!"

"Won't let me! I like that. How are you going to stop me if I make up my mind to do it?"

"I'll tell Mr. Jewel, and put him on his guard."

"Indeed! You think you will, but I think differently. Maybe you think I'm a little lamb to be led to the slaughter and can't help myself. Maybe you flatter yourself that I don't know you're sweet on that prig, Jewel, and have been for—"

"I am not!"

"Oh, yes, you are. I've suspected it ever since you asked him to help on *Chips*, and then flew into such a

rage when Jake accused him of setting the fire. I suspected it all the more when you wheedled me out of printing that item about him, pretending it would hurt some scheme you were working up for our mutual benefit. It may occur to you, by the way, that that's the last we've heard of your little scheme. You're pretty clever, Nell; but this time I've caught you. I suggested my little plan about Jewel to see how you'd take it. You've given yourself away, just as I expected."

"I don't believe you, and I haven't given myself away, at all. You bring me out here to listen to a pack of lies about Mr. Jewel, hoping I'll help you to ruin him for the sake of a few dollars; but I won't do it. I don't believe what you've said about him; Mr. Jewel is a gentleman; I don't believe he'd do such a scoundrelly thing. I don't know what hold you have on him, but there must be something you know that would injure him, or you wouldn't propose such a thing."

"You bet I know a lot about him, and if some other people knew it he wouldn't be strutting around here pretending to be so much better than his neighbors."

"He's a big sight better than you are, Bill Bartley."

"You think so, do you? Maybe you'll change your mind when you know a little more about him. I'll pull him down off his high horse one of these days."

"If you do anything to injure Mr. Jewel, Bart, I'll send you to State's prison!" Nell was fast losing control of her temper under the exasperating sting of Bartley's taunts and threats.

"Dear me! You're getting dangerous, aren't you? You forget that what's sauce for the gander in such a case would be sauce for the goose, as well. By George! You'd be a goose for fair if you scalded yourself just to get me into hot water."

"Humph! you're the one who forgets. There's at least

one thing that I didn't have a hand in—nor even a little finger; and that one thing's enough."

Bartley looked at her sharply.

"That thing is—?"

"Robbing the Midland Post Office!"

Bartley preserved his composure. "Nonsense!" he declared; "what makes you think so?"

"I don't think; I know. You say I'm clever; but you acted as if you thought I was a simpleton when you told me the yarn about being out at two o'clock that morning looking for news, and then coming to your office at six o'clock to write copy for *Chips*. Besides, you'd been hard up just before then, and were flush all of a sudden."

"That's only suspicion on your part. You've got nothing to back it up."

"How about a letter to Sam Hawkins postmarked in Detroit the day before the robbery, but without the Midland postmark, and found in your possession that very morning? Maybe the Post Office people would say that's only suspicion?"

This time the editor was startled. "Who has such a letter?" he demanded. "If you have, you stole it yourself."

"Oh, no; I found it in your office at seven o'clock that morning, and I can produce it and swear to the facts whenever necessary."

"Humph, I wondered what had become of that letter. I had it—no use denying that—but it was given to me that morning. I didn't get it out of the Post Office myself."

"Now don't try to squirm out of it; you can't fool me. You're one of the three men who did the job, all right; and I can make a pretty good guess who the others are. A word from me would send you to prison, and you know it."

"Well, you'd better not say it, then. In the first place, you're dead wrong. I could prove an alibi. In the second place, you'd find it wouldn't be so easy to clear yourself. They'd want to know why you kept quiet so long, and why you held on to that letter you say you have, belonging to Hawkins; and there'd be some other things you'd have to explain. You'd make a pretty spectacle of yourself."

Nell was silent. It suddenly occurred to her that Ned would know how she had deliberately lied to him about the letter, and that he would believe she was aware of the robbery all the time, and perhaps had profited by it. She could not bear the thought of his contempt. There was Brinton, too. He had told her he believed she had a good heart. Praise of that kind had been sweet to her. It was the first time anyone had told her such a thing. She had begun to wish she might deserve it. What would he think if he knew she had kept Sam's letter and persisted in lying about it, to say nothing of shielding the thieves? She was glad Bartley didn't know of her talks with Ned. He would see at once how impossible it was for her to produce the letter now, and it would therefore lose all its terrors for him. Bartley was beginning to speak again, this time in a more conciliatory tone.

"Come, Nell, what's the use of our quarrelling? There's no doubt each could tell tales on the other, but where would be the good in it? It pays better to pull together. You give me that letter—it might make trouble for awhile—and I'll let the other matter drop."

"You promise to let Mr. Jewel alone if I keep still about the letter?"

"That's what I said; you don't want me to make an affidavit, do you?"

"No; I'll just hold on to the letter to make sure. That's better than an affidavit."

Bartley swore under his breath, but thought best not to press the matter. Clearly all chance of help from Nell, in the plan he had suggested, was gone. He decided to keep his own counsel and watch his chance. For the present, he was compelled to acknowledge, Nell had the whip hand. That letter would require awkward explanations, to say the least. It would not do to irritate the girl needlessly. Probably she would swing into line again when she found out that Ned was altogether out of her reach. One thing he was determined: Ned Jewel should not stand in his way much longer, and if he could accomplish his ends without Nell's help or knowledge he would surely do so.

Mental reservations, questionings, and perplexity occupied Nell during the drive back to the village and during the evening at home. She could not expose Bartley—that was obvious; and she could not tell Ned what had been proposed concerning him. It was impossible to believe the outrageous things of which he had been accused. Yet it must be that Bartley knew more than he had told her, and had it in his power to injure Ned. The paragraph she had set up months ago and then prevented Bartley from printing could not have been based upon nothing. Ned certainly had been very much agitated. He was afraid of something; but he had denied indignantly that there was anything dishonorable in his past life. In spite of Bartley's story, and in spite of all things unexplained, Nell believed that Ned had told her the truth. She felt that she must warn him in some way to be on his guard against Bartley. The latter's promise to let the matter drop could be relied upon only so far as she made it impossible for him to do otherwise. If Ned were more friendly with her, it would be easier to warn him, but she knew that he still suspected her of wrong doing in connection with Sam's letter, and she feared he would treat her ad-

vances with coldness even if he did not repel them. Why should she care, after all? If what Bartley had told her were true, or if anything approaching it were true, the less she thought of Ned the better. But that reflection brought her no comfort. She was sure Bartley had lied. Ned was not the man to commit such a cowardly act. His eyes were too frank and manly.

A painful sense of personal lack came over Nell. She had never felt it before. Other men had flattered her and were glad to have her notice them. Was it because they cared for nothing more in a woman than a pretty face and a free manner? She was tired of such attentions. She wanted something better; she wanted to deserve something better. Why had she failed to attract such a man as Ned? Was it because she lacked the better qualities which appealed to such a man as she believed him to be? Were such qualities beyond her reach? If only she could cut loose from Bartley there might be some hope for her; but how could she leave *Chips?* Her living and the support of her mother depended upon her earnings as compositor. There was no other chance in Midland to work at her trade unless she could get a place on *The Pioneer.* That was not to be thought of for a moment. Bartley would make it impossible; and it would look as if she were running after Ned Jewel. Perhaps if she should show her good intentions by warning Ned that Bartley was plotting trouble for him and that she wanted to prevent it, he might be more kind to her. Fear of her employer's intentions and of the secret weapon with which he threatened the man she loved, tormented her during the night. She dreamed that Bartley, in the form of a serpent, glided past her in the darkness, yet she could see him plainly, and his face had a malignant look. She sprang after him and seized him, but he slipped from her grasp, and something tore her fingers. Trembling with fear and

horror she ran in the direction he had taken, but could not find him. Suddenly she came upon Ned Jewel, crouched at the foot of a tree, holding up both hands as though in supplication or to ward off a blow. Something struck him; she could not see what it was. He fell flat upon the ground, but quickly rose again and assumed the same position as before. Again an unseen blow laid him prostrate, but he rose to his knees and stretched out his hands full of leaves and stones. Nell sprang in front of him to intercept the blow he seemed to expect. He paid no attention to her and in an instant was lying prone upon the ground. The leaves and stones had been snatched out of his hands. He appeared to be dead. Nell tried to lift him up, but she could not move. She screamed, but could not hear her own voice. Instead, a shrill mocking laugh came faintly to her ears from the distance. It did not sound like Bartley nor like any voice she had ever heard. With a trembling sob, she awoke in the darkness of her own room.

The next morning she watched through the open door of *Chips* office for Ned to pass in the hall on his way to work. He came, but Mr. Brinton was with him. It had been so for several days. Nell had heard that Ned was staying in the country with Mr. Brinton. She supposed he was merely on a visit. She had not heard anything about Bessie. Bartley came in a little later. He glanced casually at Nell, said good morning, and shut the door of his sanctum behind him as he entered. Nell continued to watch the hall door which she contrived to keep open. She was nervous and restless. More than once she spoke crossly to Jake, or Ed, or Denny, much to their surprise. Shortly before noon, Bartley went out. As soon as he disappeared down the stairs, Nell strolled out into the hall, shutting the door as she did so, and stood looking out of the window at the end near Brinton's office. Presently Ned came out

to go to dinner. Nell hurried to him and stopped him at the head of the stairs.

"Mr. Jewel, I *must* speak to you a minute!"

She was trembling, and a frightened look lingered in her eyes. Ned was disposed to put her off at first, but her manner compelled his attention.

"You remember that dreadful paragraph about you Bartley was going to print last Fall; I showed you a proof of it, you know?"

"Yes, I remember. It didn't appear." Ned's interest was now fully aroused.

"I begged Bart to kill it—that is, I made him think it would be unwise to print it. But, oh, Mr. Jewel, what is it Bartley knows? He is bound to injure you; I know he is. Please be careful, and don't let him get you into any trap. I have a reason for warning you. Won't you let me help you? I could do it easier if we were friends. Can't we be friends, Mr. Jewel?"

Ned was alarmed, but he was also annoyed. How much did this girl know? Why did she warn him so earnestly, and beg so piteously to be friends with him? He answered kindly but coldly,

"I'm much obliged for your trouble. Bartley is a dangerous character and no doubt could make trouble for me or anybody else he chose. But he knows nothing about me to my discredit—absolutely nothing—that's positive. I've never knowingly wronged any man, woman, or child. If Bartley has told you anything dishonorable about me, he has lied. He's quite equal to it, I believe. I'll be on the lookout for him if he's bent on mischief."

"I might tell you more, if—" Nell hesitated with a sudden feeling of repugnance for anything like bargaining with the man whose respect she wanted. Ned waited a minute for her to continue; then he said dryly:

"Perhaps you might—about a certain letter."

A look of distress, and a low exclamation was Nell's only reply to the remark. She turned away and re-entered the printing room, while Ned went down the stairs, brooding over his own trouble and wondering what new turn was threatened by Bartley's malicious meddling. He never doubted that the editor of *Chips*, always prying into the private affairs of other people in search of scandal, had learned something concerning him, and that he meant to use it in his own characteristic way if opportunity offered. Nell Tompkins seemed disposed to prevent anything of the kind, but why she was so concerned in his behalf, Ned could not guess, unless it was that she hoped to make him overlook the matter of Sam's letter. In any event, he could only be prepared to face, in the best way possible, whatever might come. One thing was certain—at least, he had so decided in his own mind. He must not stay in Brinton's household and dally with temptation. He had reached that conclusion over night. Nell's revelation concerning Bartley's mischief-making intentions strengthened his conviction that he must return to town without delay. Yet how was he to broach the subject to Mr. Brinton? He could not bring himself to tell the true reason, nor could he think of any other adequate excuse. He had meant to tell his employer during the morning drive to the office, but had put it off until he could think of some reason that would appear sufficient. Now the urgency was greater, but he could not yet see the way any more clearly.

Several days passed in this way. In the evening, Ned decided to speak to Mr. Brinton in the morning. When morning came, he concluded that the evening would be a better time. Several times he referred to the pressure of work at the office, intimating that he was running behind, and that discipline was growing lax because of

his late arrival in the morning and early departure at night. Brinton made light of his complaints and insisted that the work was going on as smoothly as ever—that he was entirely satisfied with the office discipline.

Wednesday evening Caleb Trimmer appeared at the farm in a dazzling display of colors. His buckboard was splendid in a new coat of yellow with black stripes on the wheels. His bright red necktie, striped socks and shirt, and broad checked suit suggested the burnt cork comedian, but to Caleb's mind they proclaimed him a master of fashion fit for conquest wherever he chose to place his affections. When Bessie had finished her after-supper duties, Caleb asked her, before all the family, to go riding with him.

"It's a jim dandy night, an' the full moon comes up 'bout eight o'clock. Rob Roy's feelin' extry good; he'll give ye the beautifulest spin up the State road ye ever see—safe as a kitten, too."

"Thank you, Mr. Trimmer, ever so much; it would be lovely; but, really, I couldn't go tonight. Maybe sometime in the daytime. Mind, I won't promise—only maybe," replied Bessie, anxious to avoid hurting the good-hearted boy's feelings.

"What ye afeerd of? Me an' Rob Roy ain't a-goin' to run away with ye. 'Sides it'll be light as day from the moon. Come on! I hed my buckboard new painted for ye."

"You're very kind, Mr. Trimmer, and I'm not afraid; but it's hardly—we haven't—I mean, you'll have to excuse me this time."

Bessie was embarrassed by Caleb's persistency and the presence of Mr. and Mrs. Brinton and Ned Jewel.

"The full moon is said to be dangerous to young people at this time of year, Caleb. Bessie is quite right in avoiding it," said Mr. Brinton seriously, but with a sly

twinkle in his eyes. Bessie blushed and exclaimed, "Mr. Brinton!" Caleb, on the contrary, looked at the editor with wide open eyes and mouth agape.

"Sho! Ye don't say so! I never heerd tell o' sech a thing. What is it—anything like malary?"

"Well, not so very different; a sort of Spring fever that makes lots of trouble sometimes," said Brinton, controlling with difficulty a growing desire to laugh as he noted the very different expressions on the faces of the three young people. He was rather surprised to observe that Ned showed signs of annoyance. Caleb yielded with great reluctance.

"Reckon I ain't subject to thet kind o' fever. Never hed it yet, an' I've been out in the full moon this time o' year more times 'n ye could shake a stick at. Course ef Miss Bessie's afeerd o' ketchin' it, she'll hev to stay in the house."

And so she did. Not only that, but she stayed in the same room with the family, much to Caleb's inward disgust. How the mischief was he to make love to a girl with the old folks and another young fellow looking on? he asked himself.

The next morning on the way to town Brinton remarked upon the young liveryman's rapidity.

"He seems to know what he wants and he's going for it under a full head of steam. I'm not sure that I ought to allow it."

Ned made no reply other than a short sound in his throat to show that he heard. He was trying to make himself feel that Caleb's courtship was the best thing that could happen. At the same time he was involuntarily wishing that Brinton would forbid it.

"Caleb seems to be a good-hearted chap," went on Brinton, after a pause; "but he is decidedly—er—primitive. What do you think of it, Ned?"

"Why—I don't know—I wouldn't hinder them. That

is—do you suppose Bessie is likely to be interested in him?" replied his foreman nervously.

"That depends; naturally I should say not. Their tastes are antagonistic. Bessie wants sympathy. If I had been guessing—" Brinton stopped suddenly. Ned wondered what he had been about to say. He thought he knew; and he remembered on how many subjects he and Bessie were in sympathetic accord.

"By the way, Mr. Brinton," he said abruptly, "I've about made up my mind that I ought to go back to the village to board, where I can be nearer to the office. It's very pleasant in Oakdale, and I'm ever so much obliged for your hospitality, but I think I'll stay in town after this week."

The editor turned in his seat and looked Ned full in the face with unconcealed amazement.

"You'll do nothing of the kind," he exclaimed. "Why, you must be crazy to suggest such a thing—a man who loves the country as you do, offering to go back to a stuffy boarding-house in town for no reason at all. What put such an idea into your head?"

"Oh, it isn't right for the foreman to be coming in an hour late in the morning and leaving an hour early at night. The crew takes advantage of it. Manny thinks he needn't show up till nearly eight o'clock, and the others copy his example. Nothing is done after we go, and Jimmy cuts up, and—"

"Nonsense! You mustn't worry over trifles. We get the paper out on time, and all the job work that comes to us. I'll change the office hours, if that's all that troubles you."

"I—think I ought to go back to Mrs. Plimpton. She hasn't rented my room, and she has a pretty hard time to keep her boarders, I guess. There are only two or three there now."

"Ned, you're getting positively maudlin. Anyone

would think you had a bad attack yourself of that 'Spring fever' I was telling Caleb about last night. Take a good dose of salts as soon as you can, and don't let me hear any more about leaving Oakdale until you find it's an unpleasant place to live."

So ended Ned's first attempt to run away from his temptation. He accepted the situation with relief—the temptation was sweet; with fear—his power to resist had been shaken and might fail; with irritation—Caleb was on the ground, and must be tolerated.

CHAPTER XX

Two men were talking earnestly as they slowly walked along the river road entering Midland from the west. It was a bright morning in the middle of May, and seven months had passed since Robert Allen had pointed out to Sam Hawkins his debt of honor. What progress had the young man made toward the payment? The backwoods preacher was inquiring, kindly, but anxiously, and Sam had nothing but failure to report.

"Do you think it is a mistake, after all? Do you feel uncertainty or doubt as to whether it is the work you must do?" pleaded Allen.

"No; that's the worst of it," said Sam. "I can't get away from the feeling that it ought to be done, and that somehow I must try to do it; but it seems to grow more impossible all the time."

"It's the hate that makes it seem impossible. If you could get the hate out of your heart and feel only compassion and a desire to help, you would find the great difficulty removed. You and I can't afford to hate anyone, Sam—even the worst man we know."

"I know that, and I do try to change my feelings toward Bartley; but when I see him it all comes back."

"Why should it? He is the brother in terrible need—more terrible because he does not realize it. He is the perishing soul, and you are the one upon whom is laid the obligation to rescue him."

"No; he is my enemy, the man who hates me, and goes about trying to injure me; and I'm the very last man on earth he would listen to if I tried to preach to him."

"Just so, Sam. 'If *thine enemy* hunger feed him; if *thine enemy* thirst give him drink.' Don't try to preach to him. Of course he wouldn't listen. Heap coals of fire on his head. Show him there is no hate on your side. Break down his wall of enmity, and then you can get through the breach. As long as you hate him, he will know it, and will keep the fortress of his own hatred strengthened and bristling with guns."

"I should think you would tackle Bartley yourself. You could do it ever so much better than I can ever hope to."

"No; he is not for me. I have never been brought close enough to him. My work is elsewhere. Besides, would you have me rob you of the thing that is hard to do, and that in the doing, or at least the earnest attempting, will prove your right to what you have received for yourself? If there is any command intended for you and for me it is the one given by the Master when he said 'freely ye have received, freely give.' There can be no doubt of how freely you received when in desperate need. The rest remains with you as a sacred obligation. You'll not fail, Sam; you'll not fail." There was both appeal and confidence in the minister's voice as he rested his hand heavily upon his young friend's shoulder and looked into his face with an affectionate, earnest gaze. Sam felt strengthened. His purpose took new root. He held out his hand, and it was taken at once in a mighty grip.

"I'll certainly try," he said. "I may not do any good, but I'll surely make the attempt."

They had entered the village and continued on down Main Street. At the Post Office they separated, Allen stopping for mail, while Sam went on to attend to an errand for Lettie at the grocery store. He moved with a more elastic step than usual. There was a tonic in the passionate tones and words of his friend, the minister,

which seemed to get into his blood. His hatred of Bartley seemed, for the moment, to be melting into pity. The task of conquering his enemy that he might do him good began to look less like the impossible. For the first time a sense of exhilaration came over him at the thought of undertaking so hard a task; and almost involuntarily he lifted an unspoken petition for the power to control himself and to reach his adversary. In Marks's store he found a number of customers and loungers engaged in animated discussion.

"It's kinder hard on ye, Peter," Jake Vogel was saying; "but you oughter known Bartley's bubbles always burst."

"This seemed different," replied Peter Hale, the gunsmith. "The salt was there on the surface, an' Stern thought enough of it to lend a thousand dollars to work it."

"I heard Stern say he had about decided to foreclose on his mortgage. The first six months' interest is overdue," said Arthur Renwick, the head man of the Titta-bawassee Boom Company.

"Gee whiz! where will I come in then?" exclaimed Peter mournfully. "I spose they ain't no more hope at all of findin' salt."

"Guess not, now," said Renwick. "The last I heard, the borers had gone twelve hundred and fifty feet and then had to stop because water gushed up, but there was no salt."

"Reckon my ten shares o' stock ain't worth much. I'll sell 'em right now to the highest bidder, an' be glad to git rid of 'em." Peter Hale pulled out of his pocket a folded paper and flourished it in front of the group in the store. No one made a bid, and he put the paper back in his pocket.

"You're lucky *you* didn't buy thet Hammond place, Sam," remarked Vogel. "Bartley thought he was a

winner when he jumped your claim. I spose you're tickled to death to see him git stuck so bad?"

Sam thought a moment. He had been glad. Somehow he felt ashamed now to realize what secret pleasure Bartley's failure with the property had given him. In the flush of enthusiasm which had come upon him since his talk with Robert Allen, he was sure that his attitude toward Bartley had changed. His reply to Vogel was sincere, therefore, although it sounded strange to himself no less than to the others.

"No, I can't say that I am; I'm rather sorry."

"What! you don't mean it? Bart's done everything he could to hurt you. I should think you'd hate him like pizen an' be mighty glad to see him git the worst of his own trick."

"Perhaps it looks that way to you, Jake; but I don't hate Bartley. I've never done him any injury, so why should I hate him? We hate people we've wronged, don't we? Of course, I don't like the way Bartley treats me; I wish he wouldn't; he has no cause to; but I don't hate him, and I'm sorry he hates me."

"Wall, by jingoes! You're the funniest fellow I've seen yet," declared Vogel. "If I was in your place I'd want to see that crook go to everlastin' smash, an' have a hand in sendin' him there myself."

"Don't worry, Jake; he'll land in jail one of these days, all right, if he don't—"

Renwick was suddenly interrupted by the sight of Bartley himself standing in the doorway with a sardonic grin on his face.

"Go on; don't mind me," he said, coming into the store. "I've been enjoying your chatter. Sorry to interrupt. Say, Marks, how long since the old ladies' gossip circle took to meeting in your store? I'll have to come around after this and write it up for *Chips*. Oh, don't go!" he exclaimed, as Renwick and Vogel

moved toward the door. "I want to give you an item of gossip. You can talk about it over the back fence with the woman next door after you wash your dishes to-night."

"Hold your jaw, Bart, or I'll close it for you. You ought to know that I'm not the man to take any of your insolence," said Renwick, turning upon the little editor with a black look.

"My! you look dangerous. Marks, you wouldn't let the big man hurt me, would you?" cried Bartley in mock alarm. "I just wanted to tell you all some interesting news. Wait a minute, though. I believe I heard Mr. Hale, here, offer to sell his stock in the Salt Company to anyone who would make him an offer. Is that right, Peter?"

"I did say I'd be glad to git rid o' the shares at a fair price," admitted Hale.

"Well, I know who'll buy them quick enough," said Bartley; "but it wouldn't be fair to take advantage of your ignorance. Those shares will be worth more than par before another week's over."

"How so? Have ye struck salt?"

"No; something far better. We have tapped the most wonderful mineral spring in the State—maybe the most valuable in the country. We've had the water analyzed and it is found to be full of the most marvellous health-giving and curative properties. Plans are under way for a fine sanitarium hotel on the property. The same company will control it. Inside of six months you'll see the village of Midland City booming as never before, and wealthy invalids from all over the world coming here to spend their money and be cured. By the way, Hale, what is that sacrifice figure you put on those ten shares? My friend wants to know at once."

"I—I'll think it over," said the gunsmith, and hurried off to puzzle over this new development.

"That sounds like another of Bartley's bubbles," said Vogel, as he went out of the store with Renwick.

Sam Hawkins was the only customer remaining. He had been waiting to give his order to Marks. This done he hesitated whether to speak to Bartley, or go away as if he wished to avoid him. The editor of *Chips* had ignored him entirely since entering the store. Even now he appeared not to see him. Sam reflected that Bartley must have overheard his remarks if he had heard the gunsmith's offer to sell his stock. Perhaps he was just a little uncomfortable himself. No doubt, Sam's remarks had taken him by surprise. It might be as well to let the matter rest there for the present and give Bartley time to digest what he had heard. Receiving his packages from the grocer, Sam went on his way with a heart lighter than it had been for a long time. He felt that his first step had been taken.

"Struck it rich, have you?" inquired Marks as Bartley strolled up to the counter. It was the grocer's policy to be friendly to the just and the unjust alike if they had money to pay for groceries.

Now that his other customers were gone, he could with more safety show his politic cordiality to the unpopular editor of *Chips*.

"You bet I have!" replied Bartley. "I'll give those calamity howlers a new tune to sing. They'll wish they had taken a share in the thing when they find it making barrels of money for the stockholders."

"Going to build a new hotel?"

"Chabington's figuring on moving his hotel out to the spring, and making enlargements and improvements to suit high-class patronage. That'll take less time and cost less than building a new hotel. We want to get ready for business before the summer is over."

"Chabington's going to run it, is he?"

"Yes, he'll be the manager for the company. He's a

first-class—thunder! what a devilish pretty girl! where did she spring from?"

An open buggy had stopped in front of the store and a light, agile girl stepped out. She was clad in a loose-fitting dress of soft white material daintily figured with brown and red. A wealth of wavy brown hair flowed from beneath her straw hat. She tossed her head saucily at the old horse as she fastened him to the post, and spoke to him with an affectionate warning.

"Now, Dan, be a good boy, and stand still."

"Ye Gods! what eyes, what a mouth, what a neck! Who is she?" exclaimed Bartley again.

"She's living with the Brintons out on their farm. Her brother, John Carroll, is Brinton's farmer," whispered Marks, hurriedly, as Bessie came into the store.

"You don't say! The little housemaid, I suppose?"

"Sh!—Good morning, Miss Carroll. Come down to do some shopping?" was Marks's greeting.

"Good morning, Mr. Marks. Yes, Mrs. Brinton wants some things in a hurry, and she forgot to tell Mr. Brinton, so I came for them." She produced a slip of paper with her list of requirements and began telling them off to the grocer, taking no notice of Bartley, who stood near by. The editor of *Chips*, however, was not disposed to be ignored. He considered himself a connoisseur of female beauty, and immediately decided to pluck this new flower, never doubting his ability to do so. He edged closer along the counter.

"Lovely May morning," he said familiarly.

Bessie looked up in surprise. She did not know him.

"Yes, sir," she replied, and turned back to Mr. Marks.

"Live up at Brinton's place in the country?" persisted Bartley. "I didn't know Brinton had such an eye to beauty. I envy him."

Bessie shrank a little further away, and made no answer, but she looked at the grocer with a frightened,

questioning glance. Marks made a grimace in Bartley's direction intended to be in the nature of a warning, but the editor did not so interpret it. He was not easily discouraged.

"Your name is Carroll, I believe? I think I know your brother. He used to work for Hawkins, didn't he? I am William Harrington Bartley, editor of *Chips*. Your employer is an esteemed contemporary of mine."

"I don't wish to know you, sir," Bessie declared, drawing away still farther. She was beginning to tremble with annoyance and fright, which increased when Bartley mentioned his name. She had heard Mr. Brinton and Ned speak of him, and she regarded him with horror.

"Dear me! I hope you don't mean that, my dear, because I want very much to know you. It's painful to have such a pretty girl tell you—"

"Mr. Marks," cried Bessie, throwing down her list, "please make out those things the best way you can. I'll come back for them when you haven't any loafers standing around to insult me. Next time I'll ask Mr. Brinton or Mr. Jewel to come with me." She marched out of the store, her heart beating with fear and excitement, but her head tilted up defiantly. She paid no heed to the grocer's protestations that Bartley meant no harm. In another minute she had untied Dan and driven away, leaving the editor of *Chips* with a new experience, and a new item of gossip for his paper.

"Holy Venus! but she's a little spitfire, isn't she?" exclaimed Bartley, when he had recovered from his momentary surprise.

"You went at her too suddenly. She's timid, an' I spose she ain't used to makin' acquaintances so quick." Marks didn't dare to rebuke the fellow. He was restrained both by business policy and by a fear of the editor's troublesome pen.

"Nonsense! They all like the flattery, though they pretend to be indignant. But, heavens, man! did you notice that dream of an ankle as she jumped into the buggy? She was never brought up as scullery maid on a farm."

"No; she's a city girl; been to school, or lady's maid, or something; I don't know what. The Brintons treat her as one of the family," explained Marks.

"What did she mean by saying she'd ask Jewel—? by Jove! he's living out there with Brinton, too, isn't he? Well, I'll be—! Say, Marks, this is the most interesting thing I've run across for an age. I'll have to get back to the office and chew over it alone. I forget now what I was going to buy this morning. The old lady'll be around later, I guess."

All the way to his office, and after shutting himself into his sanctum, Bartley continued to indulge in little half-uttered expletives and comments. So that's what he's up to—the very thing—don't know that I blame him—but if he only knew—lucky he don't—Nell can go to blazes; I'll manage it without her—Whew! what a luscious morsel, though—sure case; can't help himself—must get the other business started. Bartley, thereupon, began writing for *Chips* a glowing announcement of the great discovery of mineral waters and of the plan for making Midland the mecca for pilgrims throughout the country in search of health.

CHAPTER XXI

When the account of Bessie's meeting with Bartley reached Oakdale, indignation flamed up in five male hearts so hotly that Mrs. Brinton, to whom Bessie had told the details of the affair, regretted speaking of it at the supper table. Bessie's brother, John, wanted to hitch up the buckboard at once and drive into town to horsewhip the editor of *Chips*. Dave thought a coat of tar and feathers would be appropriate after the whipping. Percy Ravenstock grunted fiercely and suggested an even more primitive and effective punishment. Ned Jewel's anger did not find such open expression, but he looked at Bessie and at Mr. Brinton, and something in that silent look and the rigid set of his jaws frightened the girl more than all the outspoken threats of her brother and the other men. She began to protest against any hasty action and hoped they wouldn't do anything to make the trouble worse. Mr. Brinton was no less indignant than the rest, but his blood was cooler, and his method more judicious. He declared quietly, but in a tone that showed no intention to temporize or be lenient with the offender, that he would take at once all necessary steps in the matter, and that Bessie need not have the slightest fear of a repetition of the annoyance. The others must be content to leave the case entirely in his hands.

Ned was not satisfied with this calm treatment of so flagrant an offence. He spoke more freely with Brinton on the way to the office the next morning.

"What are you going to do with that hound, Bartley?" he asked. "It seems to me he needs rough

handling. He won't care anything for polite remonstrances."

"That's where you're liable to make a mistake, Ned. The fellow has almost unlimited capacity for mischief; he's bitterly revengeful, and doesn't care how far he goes. We must be careful in dealing with such a fellow. It would be easy to make a bad matter worse. I certainly shan't mince matter, though. He's got to understand that none of that business will be tolerated. I think I can make him grasp the idea."

"I hope so. I don't believe I could take it as coolly as you do. *Chips* is nuisance enough and too much; but insulting a helpless, innocent girl on the street or in the stores is beyond the limit. There's no telling what he may do next, if we put up with this."

"I don't intend to put up with it, Ned—not for a minute."

"Well, then, I think some kind of swift punishment ought to follow immediately on the heels of the offence. Why not have him arrested this morning?"

"What could we accomplish by that? It would only drag Bessie into the court to testify against him, and make more notoriety and unpleasantness for her. Besides he would lie his way out. It isn't likely that Marks's testimony would be worth much. You mustn't be too hasty and impatient. It looks too much as if you wanted to appear as the young lady's champion regardless of results."

"Oh, no indeed! I never thought of such a thing!" exclaimed Ned quickly.

Soon after Bartley arrived at his office, a note was handed to him by Denny, who told him that Brinton's "devil" had given it to him. The note ran as follows:

"W. H. Bartley—Sir: I wish to be assured that any members of my household can go and come as they choose and when they choose without the danger of such annoyance as that of yesterday.

You may be aware that there is a law for the protection of women against just such annoyance. Before invoking that law, I desire to receive your assurance that no repetition of the offence will occur.—Jesse Brinton."

Within five minutes this reply came to Brinton:

"Jesse Brinton—Sir: An amusing little note, signed with your name, was just handed me. Did you really write it yourself? Of course, I give you my full assurance that I shall do whatever pleases me in the future as in the past.—W. H. Bartley.

"N. B. If your pretty servant doesn't like to be admired, she'd better stay at home. W. H. B."

Brinton read the note with a grim smile. "That's only the little dog's bark. I don't think he'll bite again," he said to himself; but he did not show the note to Ned Jewel.

Notwithstanding Brinton's promise that he would not mince matters with Bartley, Ned was far from satisfied. He felt that Brinton did not regard the affair seriously enough. His own sensibilities were deeply stirred, because he thought he could understand more sympathetically than any of the others, Bessie's feelings at being accosted with rude familiarity by such a man as Bartley. In his somewhat exaggerted view the thing assumed the proportions of an outrage, and he was impatient to see the perpetrator brought to book. At the same time he was quick to realize that an open move by him to accomplish this result would at once reveal to Bartley his interest in Bessie, and he knew that the editor of *Chips* would put upon it an interpretation which Ned could not by any means allow, and which might lead to most unpleasant developments, both for Bessie and himself. Still, he did not believe that any mere warning would deter Bartley from any course he had a fancy to pursue. It would be more liable to increase his zest for it. The only adequate treatment for his insolence, Ned believed, was swift punishment

without any argument. When Ned had arrived at this state of mind, it was an easy step to thinking that any excuse would answer which made it possible to give Bartley his medicine. If prudence forbade mentioning the insult to Bessie as the provocation, it would be easy to find another cause. There was the warning Nell Tompkins had given him that Bartley was plotting mischief against him, personally. At the same time, however, he remembered the paragraph Bartley had written several months ago and which Nell had kept out of the paper. Any reference to this matter might precipitate the very thing Ned dreaded most. Besides, Nell had told him of Bartley's intentions in confidence. It would not be fair to her to expose her friendly warning, and bring her into trouble with her employer, Ned thought. For the same reason he could not safely accuse Bartley of the Post Office robbery on the strength of seeing a letter bearing Sam Hawkins's name in Nell's possession. The accusation would be based only on theory and suspicion with nothing more to back it up.

Ned found himself fast veering from the desire to avenge Bessie to a positive wish for any quarrel with Bartley which would give him an excuse to do the contemptible fellow up, or drive him out of town. If he could do the latter he felt he would be conferring an immense public benefit upon the town, and upon many of his personal friends. Indeed, it seemed to him that others should join with him in bringing about this desirable result. They had suffered long enough from Bartley's fraudulent schemes, his scurrilous paper, and his offensive personality, to say nothing of several specific crimes with which he was suspected of being connected, although proof was lacking. The one among Ned's immediate acquaintances, who had the most tangible cause for wishing Bartley's downfall, was Sam

Hawkins. Ned knew nothing of his and Parson Allen's high purpose with regard to the man. He did know how grievously Bartley had wronged Sam, and he suspected him of even worse things. Doubtless Hawkins would join him gladly in bringing about the elimination of their enemy. It would be possible for them, he believed, to arouse the people of Midland to almost unanimous action and permanently abolish this nuisance.

At Ned's suggestion, Sam Hawkins and his wife, Lettie, were invited out to Oakdale the following Saturday to spend Sunday. Seizing the first opportunity for being alone with Sam, Ned told him of Bartley's insolence to Bessie, and added that he believed that it was only the beginning of a persistent course of similar persecution.

"The fellow seldom gives up a plan he has once formed, especially if he finds it is resented by persons whom he likes to annoy. He's getting to be an unbearable nuisance; don't you think so?"

"He certainly is a hard case," replied Sam a little doubtfully. All at once he felt that he must watch himself. An appeal quite different from that of Parson Allen was being made to him, and it was an appeal to which he could much more easily yield; but he must not allow himself to be drawn backward.

"It seems to me that Midland has had more than enough of the man and of his dirty paper. Shouldn't you think the village would want to get rid of them both?"

"No doubt a good many of them would. He hasn't many friends."

"I should think not!" exclaimed Ned. "He doesn't want friends; he seems to prefer enemies. I believe the time has come to take radical action for relieving ourselves of such a nuisance. Don't you?"

"Something ought to be done, I suppose; but it isn't always easy to do the right thing," said Hawkins, thinking of Allen's remedy, which he himself had undertaken to supply.

"It wouldn't be hard in this case, I'm sure," declared Ned. "You and I could very soon talk the matter up and get the decent people to join in persuading Bartley that Midland isn't the most healthy place for him to stay. If the matter were put to him in the right light by a big enough committee, and a little of the proper pressure brought to bear, I guess he wouldn't stand upon the order of his going, but go at once."

"What is it you would do?" asked Sam. He was beginning to feel a suppressed excitement over the possibilities suggested by Ned. In spite of himself, an eagerness to join in such a movement sprang into life. The community would be much better off without *Chips* and its editor. Their removal would be a public blessing, and the manner of their removal, as inferred from Ned's cautious remarks, would be an effective warning to any others who might be inclined to follow their example. Besides, it would afford him an easy escape from a difficult task—if he wanted to escape—but Ned was answering his question.

"Why, to put it plainly, we'd notify him, point blank, that he isn't wanted in Midland, and then we'd give him a certain number of hours to quit. If he didn't go, we'd ride him out on a rail with a tar mackintosh and a blanket of feathers to keep the flies off. There are lots of men who'd be glad to join us, and to make the thing more convincing, you could invite some of your friends down from Red-Keg. There's that Jim Bradshaw, for example, who handled Bartley so neatly last Fall. The whipping, by the way, didn't do much good as a cure. The fellow's incurable, in my opinion."

Sam was silent. The mention of Bradshaw's name

suddenly recalled an incident with which Ned was not acquainted. Sam remembered how the indignant sawyer had taken him from Red-Keg to Midland to see the horsewhipping of Bartley, and how, after going with him most of the way, he had refused to be a witness of his enemy's humiliation. It had been a hard fight then. He had been eager to see the affair. The influence of Parson Allen's earnest words and prayers, together with his own honest wish to do his duty and overcome his hatred, had been barely strong enough to hold him back. Was that victory over his temptation to go for nothing? Was it conceivable that after refusing to go with Bradshaw and giving him as a reason that the memory of his own wrong doing in the past made him unwilling to take part in the punishment of another wrongdoer, he would now ask Bradshaw to join him in still more severe punishment of that same wrongdoer? Was not the reason he had given then equally restraining now? More than that, he had been struggling for half a year to get the mastery of his old prejudices and to cast out utterly the feeling of hatred for Bartley in order that it might become possible for him to approach his enemy to do him good. He had declared, only the other day, that he did not hate Bartley. At the moment he had believed it to be true. Was it true? or was it only the comfortable sense that he had escaped an unprofitable business venture and that Bartley had made himself the victim which made him willing to say that he did not hate him? Sam longed to be true to himself. He was not so much troubled now in being true to others, but he feared he had been fooling himself. If not, why should he now be so keenly tempted to join in Ned's plan to drive Bartley out of town? Did he really hate Bartley? Allen had said that neither he himself nor Sam could afford to hate anyone? Sam had accepted it as true; he believed it then; he believed it now; the

reason for it rushed upon him, and filled him with instant self-reproach for his weakness and ingratitude. He would not yield; he would not take a backward step; he would not disappoint the minister who believed in him; he would not prove himself unworthy; he would not—and he gritted his teeth with firm resolve—he would not fail to hold out a hand to help instead of to beat down his perishing enemy-brother.

Ned had been waiting expectantly for Sam's reply. He could not imagine why he hesitated so long. He had paid very little heed to the several casual allusions Mr. Brinton had made in the past to Robert Allen's efforts to prevent Sam from coming to a clash with Bartley. Their significance had never been impressed upon him, and they had passed out of his mind altogether. He was wholly unprepared, therefore, for Sam's reply to his proposal.

"I can't join you, Ned. Please don't ask me. In fact, I hope you won't do anything of the kind yourself."

Ned gazed in amazement at his friend. "Well, of all things, that's the last I'd have expected!" he exclaimed. "I thought you would go into it in a minute, after all Bartley's done to make himself obnoxious to you."

"I don't want him to leave town—not yet, at least. I've got some important business with him myself, first," said Sam.

"Oh, I see," replied Ned; "you want to settle personal scores in your own way. Well, all right, I don't know that I blame you. But be careful. Bradshaw came out all right in the end, but you can't count on that. Bartley is a slippery customer."

"My revenge, if you could call it that, is not like Bradshaw's, and I hope it will accomplish more," was all Sam would say. He could not tell Ned what he

really intended, although he saw at once that a wrong interpretation had been put upon his words. His purpose must be kept to himself and his friend Parson Allen until the time should come to tell it to Bartley. Ned Jewel abandoned his own plans, thinking there was little hope of co-operation from others if even Sam Hawkins could not be enlisted. He little imagined how he had cast his own life's happiness into the balance when he made his request to Sam, nor how the latter had unconsciously determined his friend's destiny as well as his own when he withstood the temptation, and set his face steadfastly toward his great obligation.

CHAPTER XXII

Before August the Midland Sanitarium Hotel was an established fact. Ben Chabington had succeeded in moving his small hostelry to the outskirts of the village close to the wonderful mineral spring which was expected to prove a money maker as well as a health maker. He had given the building a new coat of paint, after making sundry repairs and throwing a broad veranda around three sides with wide steps in front to give the hotel a more imposing appearance. Plans were drawn for successive additions to be made as the business should grow. These plans were immediately useful in impressing stockholders, both present and prospective, with the great promise of success which the enterprise held forth. Some who owned stock in the Salt Company could not be persuaded out of their suspicions which had been aroused by one failure and by the talk of "Bartley's bubbles." They took advantage of the new boom to get rid of their shares while they could do so without too much sacrifice. The promoters, Bartley, Chabington, and Farineau, had in most cases succeeded in getting other persons to buy these shares to "protect the market." Whenever possible they had prevented the original holders from selling by dazzling them with visions of rich dividends in the future, or by scaring them into the belief that it was necessary to protect their investments.

The newspaper advertisements and circulars of the new hotel read like the announcements of a circus. It was exploited without limit in *Chips*, and the advertis-

ing bill was duly charged up to the expenses which would be a lien upon the first income of the hotel. In a much smaller way, because it was necessary to pay cash in advance, it was advertised in a few of the large city papers. Bartley sent out sensational reports of the finding of the mineral spring at a depth of "nearly two thousand feet." These reports written as news items, were printed in a few newspapers as news, costing Bartley nothing; but wherever he knew of such insertions, the items were charged up in his advertising bill against the enterprise as "reading notices at double rates."

The Sanitarium Hotel was thrown open for business even before the painters and carpenters departed. It was just as well, Chabington argued, to give arrivals a glimpse of the busy preparations for a prosperous career. But guests did not come in such numbers as the announcements had invited them to do. Two or three strangers came toward the end of July, found everything in confusion, tasted the spring, and went away. A few more came in August, and some of them stayed as long as a week; but Chabington wanted his house full. The promoters put their heads together. The next day Bartley and Farineau moved out to the hotel "for the summer." Pressure and persuasion were brought to bear upon certain of the stockholders to take rooms for themselves in the hotel to help make it boom and so realize more speedy return on their investments. Farineau made a little list of persons living in boarding houses in Midland, and, as he found opportunity, presented to them confidentially the superior advantages of the Sanitarium Hotel over a private boarding house.

One evening soon after the hotel had thrown open its doors, Caleb Trimmer was putting the harness on Rob Roy in Rounds's livery stable preparatory to a drive out to Oakdale. He was dressed in his usual gorgeous array,

the same as to coat and trousers but varied as to the accessories of fancy shirt, necktie, and socks. His red hair was oiled and scented with the barber's ointment, and his equally red face, clean and polished, glowed with the anticipated pleasure of his visit. Hank Farineau sauntered into the stable. He kept his own mare, Dolly, there, and Caleb saw him frequently.

"Hallo, Caleb, going out for a spin? You look stunning. Bet you're going to call on some girl." Farineau spoke in his most jovial, hail-fellow-well-met manner. Caleb took the compliment upon his appearance, and the guess as to his errand, as a matter of course.

"Wall, maybe," he said; "hain't nothin' to say agin it, hev ye?"

"No, indeed, not in the least. Go ahead and catch the girls while you can. I believe you're very popular with the fair sex, aren't you, Caleb?"

The young liveryman grinned broadly. Nothing could please him more than to be credited as being irresistible among the girls. He spoke deprecatingly, however, in the hope of hearing the other man insist upon the accuracy of his opinion.

"Sho! Ye can't tell what may hit their fancy. Guess they don't strain their necks much lookin' after me."

"Oh, you're too modest, Caleb. You'd make a hit with the girls with those stylish clothes, anywhere you went; but no man is so popular that he can't become more so by the exercise of a little good judgment. Let's see, where do you live?"

"At Mrs. Farley's, 'round the corner. I hev a room there."

"Oh, pshaw! that isn't the way for a fellow of your prominence to live. That's like hiding your light under a bushel. A man who can make a good appearance in public ought not to be living in an obscure little boarding house room. He ought to put up at a place more in

keeping with his standing in society—a place where he can become still better known."

"Ye don't say! Wall, now, I never thought o' thet. It's cosy enough at Mrs. Farley's, an' plenty o' good victuals. Kinder quiet, though." Caleb seemed doubtful but open to conviction.

"Yes, likely enough—comfortable, but quiet; enough to eat, but nothing going on. I take it you're fond of life and bustle. You want to be where you can see folks and be seen yourself. That's the way young fellows like you get ahead. There's nothing like getting into the swim, and having your talents recognized. That's what you want to do."

"Jimminy! I guess I do. Show me the chance, an' I'm your chicken."

"Oh, I wasn't thinking of anything special; only that it seems a pity for a stylish, popular chap like you to be hiding away in a little back street boarding house. You'd meet more important people, and cut more of a dash with the girls if you hung out at some well-known hotel, for example, the new Sanitarium Hotel. Besides," he added, mysteriously, "at such a place you stand a good chance to get a tip on a good thing now and then. All the sports and speculators come there."

Caleb's eyes began to bulge, and he stopped in the act of buckling a breeching strap to stare at his interlocutor. Farineau had touched another weak spot in the young man's armor. He longed to be considered a thorough sport fit to mingle with the fraternity, and he was always glad of an opportunity to make a small bet, if the risk was not too great.

"Thet so?" he asked, betraying his eagerness to the watchful promoter. "Reckon 'twould cost a lot to live at the hotel. Don' know's I could stand it."

"No, it wouldn't; not much more than it costs you now; maybe not as much in the long run, if you're

clever. I'll tell you what, Caleb"—Farineau came closer and adopted a very confidential tone—"I happen to know that the proprietor of the Sanitarium Hotel, Mr. Chabington, is looking for a smart, popular young man, who knows everybody, to help advertise the place and build up the business. What's the reason you wouldn't be just the fellow he wants? Here's his idea: The man is to be one of the regular guests of the hotel, just the same as everyone else to all appearance; but he is to have a special agreement with the proprietor to talk up the place everywhere he goes—tell what a fine hotel it is, how good the rooms are, and the table, and especially what a wonderful mineral spring it has—you know—just boom the place in general and try to influence his friends and acquaintances to come there. For every guest he brings in that way, he will be allowed a commission, which will be credited on his own board bill. You see, you might get out of paying anything at all."

The young liveryman had listened to this wonderful plan with almost breathless interest. Now his chest began to swell with importance as he measured in anticipation the possibilities of the scheme, and its effect upon his own fortunes, both social and financial. But he was careful as well as ambitious.

"They ain't nothin' crooked in it?" he asked, after thinking a moment.

"Oh, no indeed! not a bit; just a plain business arrangement, all fair and square; only, of course, other people don't need to know the terms of your agreement. You don't tell everybody your personal affairs, you know."

"An' I wouldn't hev to give up my job here with Rounds?"

"Certainly not; you go on just the same as ever. All you make on the side in commissions is so much velvet.

Like enough when you once get in the swim other things may come your way, too."

"By jingoes, I'm goin' to try it! How be, if I stop an' see Chabington now on my way out to Oakdale?"

Caleb could have bitten his tongue, for letting the name slip and so making it plain who was the present object of his attention. Bessie was not as responsive to his persistent courting as he wished, and so far he had gained nothing of which he felt inclined to boast. He had therefore refrained from telling his Midland friends about his visits to Oakdale. There were some pretty girls in Midland who would not refuse a ride behind Rob Roy, and it was well to keep an anchor to the windward. But Farineau seemed not to notice the implication. His reply had to do wholly with the business in hand.

"Stop there by all means; the sooner the better," he said; "and you might mention to Mr. Chabington that I spoke to you about the matter."

Caleb sprang into his buckboard and was off, with a word of assent to Farineau, who stood looking after him, a satisfied smile on his own face. He pulled out a slip of paper from his wallet and ran his eye over a list of names.

"Let's see—who shall be next?" he mused.

After his interview with the manager of the Sanitarium Hotel, Caleb put on a new air of importance. He had become a person of some consequence, and began to look forward to taking his part with the other leading men of the county in business and politics. To be sure he could not help contrasting his small bare room on the top floor of Chabington's hotel with the clean and cosy bedroom he had occupied at Mrs. Farley's. Improvements had not reached to these upper rooms; they were still the same dingy, uninviting cubby holes in which

Chabington had accommodated lumber-jacks and rivermen for years at his old stand. The cuisine, also, was not like the good home cooking of his former landlady, and he could not easily forget the surprise and almost tearful regret which the motherly old soul had shown when he paid his week's board and announced his intention to put up at the hotel. In exchange for those things, however, he had the satisfaction of sitting on the wide hotel veranda after supper with his chair tilted up, his feet on the railing, and a toothpick in his mouth; of hobnobbing with the manager and the men who, as he supposed, were "in the swim"; of posing before the out-of-town guests as one of the leading citizens of the County Seat. Surely all these advantages ought to make him a "great catch" among the girls. When his commissions should amount to enough, he would indulge himself by moving down stairs into one of the repainted and refurnished rooms which were always shown to visitors as typical of the hotel's accommodations.

Before he could earn any commissions, he must do his part as agreed and bring new patrons to the hotel. Resolutely shutting his eyes to his own poor accommodations, therefore, and imagining himself ensconced in the best room on the first floor, he went about boasting of his luck in securing new quarters at the Sanitarium Hotel and enlarging upon its superior advantages. To every customer of Rounds's livery stable he broached the subject, and among all his acquaintances it was his chief topic of conversation. One of the first whom he sought to persuade was Ned Jewel. He supposed Brinton's foreman was merely staying at the farm for the summer and that he would naturally be looking for a boarding place again in the Fall. It would suit Caleb perfectly if he should decide to hasten his departure from the farm. While he did not regard Ned seriously

as his rival for the affections of Bessie, because he saw no suspicious demonstrations such as he was in the habit of making, yet he always felt uncomfortably handicapped when Ned was around. The presence of such a good-looking, available fellow in the same house with the girl to whom Caleb was paying court was, at best, a disadvantage to be removed if possible. But his suggestions of the Sanitarium Hotel did not meet with any encouragement from Jewel. Caleb learned for the first time of Ned's enmity for Bartley. He had not heard of Bessie's unpleasant experience.

"If I go back to the village, I shall take a room at my old boarding house," Ned declared. "I wouldn't live at Bartley's hotel if I could have my board free."

"Don't see what Bart's got to do with it. Chabington runs the place alone," Caleb replied, somewhat taken aback.

"It's Bartley's scheme. He owns the property, or part owns it—got it by tricking Sam Hawkins out of his option."

"Wall, ye needn't go there ef ye don't want to. Jest thought I'd mention it. No harm done, I hope." Caleb felt that he had been snubbed, and he came as near as he ordinarily did at such times to showing irritation. Ned at once changed his own manner. He did not mean to hurt the good-hearted fellow.

"Certainly not, Caleb, no harm in the least; you meant all right, only you don't know some things that I happen to know. If you did, I'm pretty sure you wouldn't stay at that place yourself."

"Ye don't say! What is it. I don't want to be mixed up in anything crooked, ef thet's what ye mean."

"No, I don't say you are. You're all right, Caleb. What I meant is a personal matter, and it would only make trouble if I told you." Ned had no objection to setting Caleb upon Bartley, but he did not fancy having

him appear as the champion of Bessie, as he undoubtedly would do if he knew that Bartley had bothered her.

Ned Jewel's refusal, and more, his insinuations, shook Caleb's confidence to some extent; but he felt committed to his venture and determined to put forth his very best efforts to achieve success. With Caleb, that meant throwing his whole heart into the affair. He had expected that Bessie Carroll would be suitably impressed when he told her of his step toward becoming a prominent citizen. She did manifest some interest, but not quite what he had looked for. When he first mentioned the name of the hotel, she exclaimed, somewhat tartly, he thought, "That's the place that man Bartley owns, isn't it?"

Caleb's face fell. He seemed to be running against Bartley at every step. "Don't know's you'd say he owns it. Mr. Chabington keeps the hotel; he moved it out there, an' he owned it before it was moved, so I reckon he owns it now. Course, Bart may hev an interest in the business for all I know."

"Never mind, Mr. Trimmer, we won't talk about who owns it. Do you like it better than your boarding house?"

"Wall, ye see, Miss Bessie, it's more up to date for a young feller like me. Got to be in the swim nowa-days ef ye want to 'mount to suthin."

"That isn't what I asked. How does it compare with where you were for comfort?"

"Oh, it hes a big piazzy runnin' 'round the front an' sides where you can sit like somebody an' smoke after supper—only I don't smoke, Miss Bessie; an' they's a spring o' some kinder medicine water comin' from 'bout a mile down in the ground. Thet's goin' to make all our fortunes who git in on the ground floor, old man Chab says; an' there's rich people from the city stoppin' there; an—"

"But is your room as nice as the one you had at Mrs. Farley's? And is the cooking as good? You know you told me my cooking was as good as Mrs. Farley's, and I know you meant it to be a compliment."

"So I did, Miss Bessie. Mrs. Farley's cookin' is the best I ever see, next to yours. Can't expect sech cookin' in hotels; an' my room ain't quite the same, but they's some jim dandy rooms on the first floor thet I can hev when I can afford to pay for 'em."

"There must be a lot of noise, and men drinking in the bar-room. You don't drink, do you, Mr. Trimmer?"

"Never drank a drop in my life. I don't hev to go into the bar-room; an' my nerves ain't weak. I kin stand noise."

"Well, I hope you won't have any bad luck, and that Mrs. Farley will take you back when you want to come," said Bessie in a tone of pity which seemed to Caleb entirely out of place. He did not mention the hotel matter again at Oakdale.

The one great feature of the Sanitarium Hotel was, of course, the deep spring which was the cause and excuse for its existence. This spring was the chief talking point in all advertisements, circulars, and correspondence. Bartley had, as he claimed, procured a chemist's analysis of the water, and on the strength of this analysis, claimed valuable curative properties for the spring. That there was some virtue in the water could not be denied, when old Mrs. Le Roque and her husband, from some town in Ohio, after drinking it persistently for a week declared that it had cured a complaint of long standing. Their testimony was emblazoned on the front page of *Chips* in the largest type the office afforded, and was heralded abroad by every device at the command of the promoters. Then there came a need for other testimonials of like character to reinforce the first one and keep the ball rolling. Such a need could

not be left long unsupplied by such resourceful men as Bartley, Farineau, and Chabington. New cases of remarkable "cures" were reported every few days and duly featured in print. The number of guests increased until the Sanitarium Hotel was nearly full, and talk of building an addition was started to call attention to the approaching era of prosperity. If the delay in erecting this addition was due to the small cash receipts from certain guests, no one knew it but the managers.

Caleb Trimmer, determined to earn commissions, and to "go the whole ticket" in booming the hotel, was swept along with the excitement and by the example of these marvelous cases of cure. He had been for two weeks or more at the Sanitarium, and had dutifully swallowed a small portion of the spring water every day. He suddenly realized that he was feeling remarkably well. He swung his long arms, and then sprang into the air and kicked his heels together. He went out into the woods and "hollered" with all the power in his lungs. He thumped his chest, and felt of the muscles in his arms and legs. He couldn't find an ache nor a pain anywhere in his body. His appetite was mighty, he could sleep like a log, run like a house afire, and wrestle with a bear if need be. Yes, he was "in thunderin' good shape," he told himself. That this startling fact had never occurred to him before must be a sign that he had been ailing. He hadn't noticed anything especial, to be sure; but neither had he noticed this splendid, rushing, bounding health. He couldn't have been so well before, or surely he would have noticed it, because now he could feel it tingling in every nerve of his body. On the other hand, how many poor victims were entirely ignorant of some fatal malady until it carried them off? There could be no doubt of it—he had been cured by drinking the spring water! Perhaps it had saved his life! Here was something worth talking about.

Never mind such petty things as rooms and victuals. Everybody had them one way or another. This healing spring was a greater thing—a matter of life and death. It ought to be proclaimed aloud. Chabington was the first to whom the fortunate youth revealed his wonderful cure.

"Glad to hear it, son," said the proprietor, with a good-natured grin. "I never knew you was sickly, but 'tain't safe to judge by looks. They're apt to be deceivin'. Glad you're cured. That ought to make it easy for you to bring your friends here. Push the thing along."

Caleb did push it along. When he went to the livery stable the next morning, old Rounds was sitting on a stool by the door smoking his first pipe for the day.

"Thet there spring water out to the hotel is mighty fine stuff," Caleb declared as he began his morning's work. "It's clean cured me. I feel frisky as a two-year-old."

The old liveryman looked at his assistant in astonishment. "Cured ye? What of?" he asked, when he saw Caleb was in earnest.

"Why, everything—or anything that ailed me. Ye can't always jest git the name to it. Folks sometimes drops off kinder sudden like, an' nobody kin tell what 'twas they hed."

"Humph!" grunted Rounds, "what makes ye think ye been cured, then, if ye don't know what ailed ye?"

"Gosh! thet's easy. I kin tell by my feelin's. Never felt so good all over es I do now. How d'ye 'count for thet 'nless I've been cured o' suthin'?"

The old man had no argument ready to meet such a question. He grunted good-humoredly and told Caleb that "'s long 's ye feel good, it don't matter whether ye've been cured, or whether it's jest natural."

A group of men stood around the Post Office later in

the forenoon when Caleb came in to get his employer's mail. Jake Vogel was there with his friend Charlie See, a shingle packer and local poet, whose rimes might be found scribbled on doors, fences, and boarding-house walls and other available places all over the village. Manny Matthews had come over from *The Pioneer* office on an errand to the Postmaster's stationery store; and one or two others were lounging at the door.

"Hello, Charlie!" exclaimed Caleb as he caught sight of the shingle packer, who looked enough like him to be an elder brother. "Where ye been keepin' yourself the past month? Hain't see ye."

"By Jingoes, Caleb, you're a sight
To cure sore eyes, an' that is right.
I've been to Saginaw with Bill
A-packin' shingles at the mill;
An' now I'm back to Midland City
To see my girl, who's awful pretty.
How be ye, Caleb, anyhow?
You're lookin' mighty well, I vow,"

replied Charlie in a sing song voice, as he held out his hand to grasp that of his friend. The usual laugh and applause greeted his impromptu rimes, a tribute expected as a matter of course by the poet.

"You bet, I'm feelin' mighty well," declared Caleb, glad of an opening. "Never felt so good in my life. I've been cured by drinkin' the water o' thet spring down to the Sanitarium Hotel."

"What's that?" demanded Charlie, sharply; and Jake, Manny, and the others drew near, grinning, to hear the joke which they supposed Caleb was about to spring on them.

"Fact," asserted the young man earnestly. "Been takin' the water two weeks, reg'lar, an' it's cured me clean through. I tell ye, thet's great stuff in thet there spring. Everybody's bein' cured by it. Maybe it saved

my life. Ye can't tell what might o' happened ef I hedn't taken it. Don't see what there is to laugh at."

A loud guffaw from the listeners put a stop to his explanation. The men seemed to enjoy the joke even more than they had expected, because it was evidently unintended.

"He was such an invalid, poor fellow; and he was cured by swallowing some of Bartley's bubbles," said Manny Matthews in a most sympathetic tone, and another roar of laughter followed the sally.

"More likely the water's gone to your head, Caleb," said Jake Vogel. "You're talkin' foolishness. I've known ye sence ye were a baby, an' ye hain't been sick a day in your life, only when ye hed the measles. There wasn't nothin' the matter with ye to be cured."

"Got your testimonial written for *Chips?*" asked Manny. "I spose next week we'll see your name in big type on the front page as another example of the miraculous virtues of Bart's bubble fountain?"

"There's a sporty young feller named Trimmer,
Who's slim, but who could be some slimmer.
He dreamed he was sick
Got well very quick.
On a gallon of water—did Trimmer."

sang Charlie See, who seemed unable to think or speak except in doggerel.

"Ye're all terrible funny, ain't ye?" growled Caleb. "Reckon I ought to know my own feelin's. I ain't the only one thet's been cured. There's plenty more. Why don't ye go laugh at them?"

"The chances are their cures are the same as yours—nothing the matter with them to cure; only we don't know them so well," said Manny. "We all know what Caleb's cure amounts to."

As soon as he could escape the badinage, the young

man returned to his work feeling depressed, disappointed, and even doubtful of his own ground. His cure did not make the sensation he had pictured to himself. It did not seem likely to help him much in attracting people to the hotel. What if *Chips* should print a story about him? Somehow this did not appeal to him after his experience at the Post Office. Perhaps it would be just as well not to say anything more about the case. If Bessie should take the same view as Jake Vogel and the rest, it would not help him, especially if she knew how he had been laughed at in the village.

It was not so easy to drop the matter, however. In a few hours, the story was all over town. People who passed Rounds's livery stable stopped to congratulate Caleb on his marvelous cure. One said he had given the young man up as incurable, and never expected to see him so spry again; another declared that Caleb might thank his lucky stars he hadn't died before the spring was found; another insisted upon looking at his tongue and feeling his pulse to be sure that the cure was genuine. Every inquirer left with a laugh or a grin after asking how the water tasted, or how much of it he drank, or whether it affected the appetite, etc. The next morning, pedestrians who were abroad early found a broad white cedar shingle nailed to the pump in front of the Post Office and upon it was written in pencil the following effusion, unsigned, but unquestionable as to its authorship:

CALEB'S CURE.

Our Caleb is a likely lad
We've never seen him very mad
We always thought him well and strong
In which it seems we all were wrong.
A dredful alement layed him low
But what it was he doesnt know
He never felt of pain a mite
Nor suffered loss of appetite

He done his work and played his play
And looked the same from day to day
But that dred alement must be cured
Which Caleb thought he had endured
He went to live at Bart's hotel
And there the water made him well
He drank a quart or two a day
Twas all included in the pay
And now he says he's well and strong
Which we were thinking all along.
It maybe if you look you'll find
That alement only in his mind
So if you're feeling well to-day
But think some alement's hid away
Don't take no chances but be sure
To try a dose of Caleb's cure.

Crowds hung around this shingle all the morning, no one offering to remove it. Before noon the rimes were in every mouth and "Caleb's Cure" was a byword and jest which promised annoyance for more than the young liveryman. Indeed, every person within reach who had claimed to be benefited by the spring water was asked again and again if he had taken Caleb's cure. All the alleged cures fell at once, by general acceptance, into the same category. The spring itself began to be called Bart's "Bubble Fountain," and Manny Matthews, who prided himself upon originating the name, did his best to promulgate it far and wide.

The three promoters were in a panic when they found the storm of ridicule threatening to undo all their work. Farineau made haste to hunt up Caleb and call him to account.

"What do you mean, you idiot, by making such a fool of yourself and ruining our business with your cock-and-bull stories?" he demanded.

"Don't git too free callin' names, Hank," retorted Caleb hotly. "I hain't been makin' no fool o' myself, 'nless it was givin' up a good boardin' house an' landlady to go to your skin hotel. I done what I agreed, an'

Chab told me to push it along about bein' cured. Strikes me now they ain't no cure in the blame spring at all. Ef I'd stopped to think about my feelin's before drinkin' the stuff, like es not I'd found I was es well es I am now." Caleb, in his indignation at Farineau's attack was not disposed to spare himself if that meant defending the spring. He felt that he was being used very unjustly, and all his devotion to the hotel vanished like smoke. Farineau saw that he was likely to do more damage if he scolded the young man too severely. He began to adopt a more conciliatory tone.

"I didn't mean you hadn't done as you agreed," he said. "Your zeal ran away with your judgment, that was all. Of course everybody knows you're as sound as a nut, and to say you've been cured by the spring water turns the whole thing into a joke."

Caleb did not reply, but walked away abruptly. The next day Mrs. Farley welcomed him back with open arms.

CHAPTER XXIII

None of the echoes from "Caleb's Cure" disturbed the peace of Oakdale farm. Both Mr. Brinton and Ned, out of consideration for Caleb, who was a frequent visitor, refrained from telling of the affair, and the other men seldom went to the village. Caleb had been almost afraid to go to see Bessie for some days, for fear she would be ready to join in the raillery which met him everywhere else; but his desire soon overcame his fear, and he found, to his great relief, that she knew nothing of the story. He had been calling on her at least once a week all summer, but could not see that he was making any great progress toward the intimacy he desired. She treated him kindly, only refusing to permit undue familiarity, or anything approaching sentimental speeches. The drive she had promised to take with him "sometime, maybe," was still a thing of the future. But Caleb was not easily discouraged, and felt that the absence of any direct rebuff was almost as good as permission to continue his restricted attentions. He noticed especially that Ned Jewel made no effort to interfere with them, nor did he treat Caleb with the hostility to be expected from a rival. Caleb inferred, therefore, that Ned was not himself seriously interested, and that patience and persistence would sooner or later win their reward.

Jewel was not by any means as lacking in interest as Caleb imagined. In spite of his resolve to keep himself in the background and favor rather than hinder the young liveryman's cause, Ned found it almost impossible to avoid watching with a growing pain at his heart

the constant coming and the persistent wooing of the man who had a right that was denied to him. Bessie's complaisance chafed him even more than Caleb's active attentions. He watched her without meaning to do so. He could not see that she accorded her visitor anything more than ordinary politeness, but even that, coming from her, was charming and might be taken by a simple-minded, guileless fellow like Caleb as something more than intended. Ned knew, also, that mere toleration, if nothing prevented, might one day be developed into a more tender feeling. Very well, he should not complain. He ought to wish for such a consummation.

If Ned had wished to make comparisons, he would have been forced to admit that Bessie treated him with more freedom and cordiality than she did Caleb. A bond of sympathy, almost an intimacy, had been established from the very beginning. She confided in him many little things of which she would not think of speaking to Caleb or even her brother, because they would not understand. Caleb would have given all he possessed for the little rambles about the farm alone with Bessie which Ned enjoyed because he saw no way to avoid them without being rude. Fortunately for Caleb's peace of mind, he did not know of this companionship. Ned became acquainted with all Bessie's pets and helped her care for them sometimes in the evening. He subdued Dan almost without an effort. It seemed to be enough for the old horse to see Ned in Bessie's company on terms of comradeship. The house garden became Ned's especial care under Bessie's direction. He did the weeding, cultivating, watering, and trimming in the long, light evenings after supper, or before breakfast was ready in the morning. Mrs. Brinton looked on and smiled, but did not interfere with Bessie's domination. It was all perfectly proper, she thought, that the gay little housekeeper should spend so many of her spare

moments with Mr. Brinton's foreman, of whom he always spoke so well; and so thought Bessie. Ned was one of the family. Caleb was a visitor. Besides Ned understood her better than even her own brother. Poor little Bessie could not know that Ned also understood himself better than she did, and better than anyone on the farm. She could not know that after a delightful evening in her company he sat in his room long before retiring, his hands clenched, his jaws set hard together, and his eyes staring into the darkness of night, while he sought in vain to pierce the darkness which surrounded his soul. Compare his lot with Caleb's? He did not dare to make such comparisons. What if Bessie showed him the greater kindness? He must not give it any significance. He ought not even to accept it. His lot and Caleb's? How gladly he would exchange, if such a thing were possible!

One morning Mr. Brinton, coming into *The Pioneer* office after stopping at the Post Office, handed Ned a letter. The young man took it with some surprise. He was not often the recipient of letters. When he looked at the address he turned a deathly white, and everything swam before his eyes. He glanced quickly at Mr. Brinton, but the editor had passed on into his sanctum without noticing his foreman's surprising discomposure. Ned thrust the letter into his pocket with a trembling hand. He could not bring himself to open it, there in the printing room. For a moment he stood dazed and motionless; then putting on his coat, without waiting to roll down his shirt sleeves, he snatched his hat from the hook near his desk and went out into the street. Aimlessly, but with the sense of fleeing, he started off toward the upper bridge over the Tittabawassee, and walked rapidly until he came out of the village to the road which passed through a hardwood grove between the Tittabawassee and the Chippewa. There, finding

a tree stump near the road, he sat down and pulled out the letter, but his hand trembled violently and fear and restlessness overcame him. He put the letter back into his pocket unopened. The blow had fallen at last. What use to hold out against his evil fate? What use to hope that it might be different? He took out the letter again almost as soon as he had returned it to his pocket. This time, with fingers that still shook as with an ague, he tore open the envelope and read the letter.

The minutes passed unreckoned. Ned sat, a drooping, pitiable figure, on the old stump, holding the open letter in his hand. Distress, anger, utter helplessness were pictured on his face. Half an hour slipped by. The young man started up guiltily as a buckboard came around the turn in the road. He did not know the driver, evidently some man coming from a distance, for his horse looked jaded. When he had passed, Ned sat down again listlessly. Another half hour went. It was with no sense of hurry and no apparent interest in the question of time that he finally rose and walked slowly back toward the village. He did not even look at his watch. One thing only occupied all his thoughts, but that one thing—how it touched and blighted everything in his life! A question must be answered immediately. Should he face his trouble openly before the world and bear the humiliation it would bring him, or should he accept the way offered for covering it out of sight? His soul revolted from either course. He could not decide at once; he would take time to consider.

Just before noon, Jewel hung up his hat and coat again near his desk in *The Pioneer* office. Jimmy, the boy, came to him, and, eyeing him queerly, said, "Mr. Brinton wants you. He's asked twice where you was."

Without a word Ned went into the editor's private office.

"Where did you disappear to all of a sudden, Ned?

I saw you as I came in, but before I could turn around you were gone," said Brinton.

"I'm not feeling well. I went out for a walk to clear my head," replied the foreman. His face was drawn and haggard, and his shoulders drooped like a man suffering from an illness. Brinton looked at him in surprise which quickly changed to concern.

"Well, I should say so!" he exclaimed. "You're sick, man! Sit down here while I send for Doctor Edwards. What in the world is it, and when did it come on?"

"No, sir, you needn't send for the doctor; I'm not sick—at least not so bad as to need him. I'll work it off."

"Your looks belie your words, then. By George, you look like a fit subject for bed!"

"I couldn't lie abed if I tried," said Ned. "Work's the only thing I need now. Any copy this morning?"

"Ned Jewel, I want you to get Zeke out of the stable and skip home as fast as he can take you. You're sick, I tell you."

"No, Mr. Brinton, I don't want to go home. Please give me the copy. I'll be all right after a while. I just had a bad spell for an hour or so. I'd rather fight it off here."

The editor was about to protest further, when suddenly the door of his office was pushed open, and Sam Hawkins almost sprang into the room, his face flushed with excitement, and his eyes sparkling. He stopped abruptly as he saw Brinton and Ned engaged.

"I beg your pardon," he said breathlessly. "I ought to have knocked, or sent in my name."

"That's all right, Sam; come in. Ned is sick and I was just telling him to go home; but he's as stubborn as a mule and won't budge. Something you want to see me about?"

"Yes, sir, if you're not too busy," replied Sam, glancing questioningly toward Jewel.

"Well, Ned, I'm not going to carry you home in my arms," declared the editor. "If you won't go, you won't, I suppose; but I want you to understand that you have my full permission—my command, I would say—to clear out of here and take care of yourself if you don't feel better very soon. Here's a batch of copy. Now, Sam, sit down and let's have your story," he added as the foreman went out and shut the door.

In a few minutes, Ned Jewel and his haggard face were temporarily forgotten, as Brinton leaned forward to listen to Sam's eager recital. Ten minutes later both men came out of the office and hurried away, Brinton stopping long enough before his foreman's desk to say that he should not return before lunch, and adding that Ned must take care of himself and leave the office to Matthews or Holden if he felt like going home.

CHAPTER XXIV

During September it began to be rumored about Midland that Sam Hawkins had made a strike of some kind. No one seemed to know how the report was started, nor what basis it had in fact. There had been no authoritative announcement from any source; but neither had there been any denials, and so the story gained headway. It was said that Mr. Brinton, editor of *The Pioneer*, was interested in the matter with Hawkins. The two were seen coming and going a good deal together and on one occasion both of them had been absent from town for several days. When, at length, a drilling equipment arrived and was set up on vacant land at the south side of the village, and men were engaged to operate the machinery, then it became positively known that Sam Hawkins had found salt.

The business was kept as quiet as possible. No plans nor advertisements were issued, no stock company formed, no financial aid solicited. It was generally understood that Hawkins had invested his own capital in the enterprise and owned the controlling interest, and that Brinton was helping with money and advice—that he was, in fact, a silent partner of the younger man. At a depth of seven hundred feet, rich salt springs were tapped. There seemed to be an inexhaustible supply. A complete plant for evaporating and shipping the product was established at once. The success of the venture was assured.

Friends of Sam Hawkins in Midland and Red-Keg hastened to congratulate him on his good fortune. The

County Seat, indeed, prided itself, irrespective of persons, upon possessing a new industry of such promise; but to William Harrington Bartley it was as the red rag to the angry bull. The conspicuous prosperity of the enterprise exasperated him. It seemed to mock at his own failure with the property he had snatched from Sam by trickery. Even now, the hotel and mineral spring for which so much had been promised, and upon the success of which the continuance of the mortgage, to say nothing of the support of his stockholders, depended, showed signs of coming into disrepute. The ridicule brought upon them by Caleb's cure had hurt them seriously by casting discredit upon the advertised testimonials and upon the efficiency of the spring. The latter had, as a matter of fact, medicinal qualities of real value, but these, for the time being, were lost sight of in the storm of ridicule and the wave of suspicion. Not enough money was available for exploiting the Sanitarium outside of the immediate vicinity. Few guests arrived, and the few who did come stayed only a few days. Chabington, to make expenses, paid more attention to the bar than he did to the spring. The latter was well enough to attract visitors if it could, but when they came, and were thirsty, he preferred that they should cool their throats at his bar at so much per glass. It was not long before the spring was ignored entirely, and the managers of the hotel devoted themselves to catering to local trade. Guests must be found —if not one kind, any kind would have to do. When noisy lumber-jacks filled the bar, and disreputable characters began to occupy the rooms, the few decent patrons who had come in search of health fled. One after another the men who had taken stock disposed of their shares for what they would bring, and each time the amount was less. There was not profit enough for dividends after "expenses" had been met.

His growing disaster, Bartley unhesitatingly blamed upon Sam Hawkins, Ned Jewel, and Jesse Brinton. He asserted boldly in *Chips* and on the street that these men had deliberately spread malicious reports intended to injure his business; that they were too narrow and selfish to recognize a really good thing, such as the mineral spring, which might have made the town famous and wealthy if it had been given a fair chance. He drew the deduction that they were enemies of the community who should be chastised and shunned by public-spirited citizens. Against Sam he was particularly bitter. For every issue of *Chips* he uncorked his venom bottle.

"Who is this young upstart, this precious 'brand from the burning' who comes here posing as a leading citizen and pretending to be better than his neighbors? Look up his record. Ask what he was doing up at Red-Keg two years ago. With a sanctimonious smirk on his hypocritical face, he comes to this town that was a good deal better off without him and tries to injure other people's business so that he may build up his own. No good will come of such methods. Something will fall before many days, and Mr. Sam from Red-Keg won't like the sound of it."

It took all of Sam's fortitude and resolution to bear these attacks, but by means of them he grew strong. They did not so utterly demoralize him as those of a year ago had done. He saw that they had no effect upon his friends except to make them more firmly than ever his friends. He felt more pity than anger for the author, but he kept putting off the effort he fully intended to make in his behalf some day, when the obstacles in the way should seem less insurmountable. One day Bartley met him face to face on the street in front of the Post Office. The Editor of *Chips* had been drinking just enough to make him careless and quarrelsome.

"Get out of my way!" he shouted, trying to push the young man aside.

Sam stood still. "Stop a minute, Mr. Bartley, I want to speak to you," he said quietly, though his blood was

beating rapidly with the stress of the purpose which suddenly took possession of him.

"You do, eh? What have you got to say, I'd like to know? Want to knock my head off for what I said about you in *Chips*, I suppose? Well, let me tell you right here, I'm not through with you by a long shot. There'll be a good deal more before there's less, and I'll see you and your salt wells wiped off the face of the earth before I'm done."

Sam drew a quick breath and took tight hold of himself. "I've got just this to say, Bartley: You're dead wrong when you think I've got any fight against you, or that I've ever said or done anything to injure you. You've hurt me, as no doubt you intended to do, by the cruel things you've printed in your paper, and I've felt like fighting you more than once; but there's two things that kept me from doing it. Some of the things you said were true; I couldn't deny them; I was ashamed of them; I didn't feel I had the right to fight on account of them. The other reason was that I had another plan—a very different one. Some day I'll try to tell you what it is. You wouldn't listen now. But be sure of one thing, Bartley: I've never tried to injure you, in spite of all you have done to me. I have no right to hate anybody. I'm sorry you hate me, because some day I want to be of some use to you. Good day."

Sam walked quickly away up the street leaving the dumbfounded editor of *Chips* standing stock still gazing after him.

Parson Allen was going away to the Upper Peninsula. The logging was practically over in the region tributary to the Tittabawassee. Lumber-jacks were migrating farther North, and the lumber-jack preacher felt that he must follow his chosen work whither it went. His heart yearned over Sam, however, and the duty he had undertaken. More than a month before he went, he

told the young man from Red-Keg that he was going, and asked him how went the siege.

"Does the enemy know he's invested? Has he any inkling yet whether Immanuel or Beelzebub commands the forces against him?"

"I don't know what he thinks," replied Sam. "I haven't made much progress yet, perhaps none at all; but I guess I surprised him the other day," and he told the minister of his meeting with Bartley.

"Good! That's a beginning—a splendid beginning, Sam—if you follow it up. He can't misunderstand you. But remember, it's only a beginning. It will lose its value unless you follow it up."

"But he may not give me the chance, and if it should come, I may not have spunk enough to take it. You have no idea how weak I felt after I spoke to him the other day. I was as limp as a rag."

"But bold as a lion when you faced him, I'll warrant. You had the strength of the Almighty to back you up. That will never fail you."

"No, but I'm afraid when you are gone it will be so much easier to put the thing off. Really, when I think it over, it seems just as impossible as ever. That little speech the other day didn't amount to much. I suppose he laughed at me as soon as he got over his surprise."

"It's not impossible, Sam, and never has been. Don't imagine it is a thing you must do alone. If so, it would be impossible. You're only the messenger, don't forget that. You've been given the message to deliver, and the message has the unlimited power of God's mercy to reach into the hardest heart. Didn't it reach me and you, Sam? And can you say, after that wonderful proof, that it could not reach Bartley? It is your great privilege to be the bearer of this message—to pass it along after receiving it yourself. You are a link in the great endless chain for carrying the wonderful

message of salvation to every one who needs it. Who knows how much may depend upon your individual part? You cannot let the chain break at your link!"

And as he listened to the ardent words of the man who was his best friend, and as his own heart responded that the words were true, Sam felt anew the sense of his debt, and resolved that the payment must not be too long deferred.

CHAPTER XXV

The song-bird of Oakdale was silent. First one and then another of the farm population commented complainingly on the fact. Dave said the work went hard with nary a tune to cheer a fellow up. John asked his little sister what she was moping about, and she declared she wasn't moping at all, and he'd better mind his own business. Nevertheless, she had a very real grievance. Her garden was neglected, unless she attended to it herself, and that came hard after she had grown into the habit of depending upon someone else, because she had filled her time with other work. Her rambles about the farm with a sympathetic companion were discontinued for lack of the companion. She was compelled to make the round of her pets to bid them good night alone, and Dan actually seemed to be looking for someone over her shoulder—the fickle old horse! At last she guessed that he had learned to expect a second lump of sugar, and after that she brought him two, whispering some little confidences, dolefully, into his ear as she gave him the second piece.

There was more to her grievance. The star boarder, in fact the only boarder, at Oakdale was hardly civil to her any more. He scarcely spoke to her of his own accord, although she did catch him looking at her gloomily now and then. It really made her feel gloomy herself; it must be contagious, she supposed. Once she had made so bold as to remind him that the garden needed weeding. His tone and look as he said "I beg your pardon, Miss Bessie; I forgot all about

it," and then hurried off to the work, frightened her, it was so queer. Only once after that had she suggested one of the accustomed rambles. His reply was almost rude, she thought. He had simply said "I can't, Miss Bessie; I'm sorry;" but there was a sharpness in the way he said it, which, carried a little further, would have been positively cross; and he didn't offer any explanation.

And so the gay singing grew less frequent until it stopped, leaving, by contrast, a funereal silence through the house and fields. Mrs. Brinton, motherly and anxious, tried to learn the cause; but only a hint was vouchsafed to her as she gathered a lonesome, tear-bedimmed little face to her bosom just before bed-time one night. She put the question, then, point blank to her husband.

"Jesse, what is the matter with Ned? He has been acting strange and looking like a graveyard for some time. More than that, he has spoken rudely to Bessie and made her cry. She hasn't been singing at all lately."

"I don't know what's the matter with the fellow; but I'm going to find out if I can," said Brinton. His next attempt, however, was no more successful than before. To his pressing questions Ned merely replied that he felt "grumpy," that he wasn't sick, that it would be hard to explain just why he felt as he did, and that since he wasn't a very agreeable boarder to have around, it would be better if he were to return to the village, where his low spirits would not be depressing to others. Brinton, though unsatisfied, did not feel that he had the right or reason to urge the matter further; but he would not permit him to leave Oakdale without a more definite reason than any he had given.

If the song-bird at the farm was sleeping, the woman there was wide awake. Caleb found it out and re-

joiced. He thought the awakening had just come, and he told himself that he had caused it. When Bessie welcomed him on Sunday with a more cordial smile than usual, he felt a delightful glow of warmth steal over him, and he expanded pleasantly. When she urged him to stay to supper, he did not stop to wonder at her unnecessary insistence in an invitation which he was ready to accept the moment it was uttered. He merely took it as another mark of the growing favor. But when she told him he might come with her while she fed her lambs, and calves, and chickens, he was intoxicated with delight. This, certainly, was the highest possible honor and could only mean that his persistence was at last to be rewarded. At supper, feeling that one favor should lead naturally to another, he made bold to remind her of the long deferred buckboard ride.

"The roads is hard, an' Rob Roy is feelin' fine; ain't it 'bout time we hed thet ride ye promised?" he asked in a low tone.

"Why, I don't know, Mr. Trimmer; perhaps"—she glanced nervously toward the other end of the table—"perhaps if you come early next Sunday afternoon—I—might ride a little way."

"Ye couldn't make it this evenin', could ye, Miss Bessie? They ain't no full moon to be afeerd of," ventured the foolish lad.

"Oh, no, not in the evening; not before next Sunday," said the girl, and her tone suggested more the putting off until the last possible moment of a dose of unpleasant medicine, than eagerness for anticipated pleasure: but Caleb was not a searcher for the hidden meanings of tones and glances. They must mean no more and no less than was conveyed in words and actions. If the latter were to his liking, he need not bother his head with the subtleties of the former.

Ned Jewel, also, was quick to take at their face value

Bessie's new favors to the young liveryman. He saw the fellow carrying the feed box for her as she went to give her pets their supper. He had carried it, himself, heretofore. He heard her promise to go riding with Caleb, and he caught her hurried glance across the table, but could not read in it anything more than a girl's natural nervousness at having such a conversation overheard. With pain and rebellion in his heart, he told himself that his escape from his own dilemma was at hand. He acknowledged a sense of relief that the trouble could go no further—that Bessie, especially, would not be made to suffer. More than once he had feared the escape would not be so easy. Now he was compelled to regard Caleb as the deliverer—his and Bessie's; yet he found it hard to be grateful, hard to appreciate the young man's service, very hard to approve Bessie's part in the matter. Caleb seemed so different from the girl, so entirely out of harmony with her in every way, so limited in his mental possibilities, as well as his material prospects. How could such a finely strung girl as Bessie be content with such a companion? He was undoubtedly guileless, clean, and unselfish. Perhaps these rare qualities were enough to commend him. Ned knew he must not interfere, no matter how unsuited, esthetically, the two were for each other. It was far better than that Bessie should allow her heart to go out to one who could only bring her misery. Yet Ned could not force himself, at present, to greet the happy swain with frank cordiality nor sincere well-wishing. Accordingly, he kept himself as much as possible out of the way, and Caleb, at least, bore him no ill will because of his retirement.

For a month or more, Ned had attended to the self-imposed duty of going to the Post Office for Mr. Brinton's mail, and any letters which might come addressed to his care. At the same time he had fallen into the

habit of asking for personal letters, a practice which he had neglected for several years because there had been nothing to repay his asking. He wanted nothing now, but he expected and feared that he would receive what he did not want. If it should come, he preferred to have it delivered only into his own hands. Wednesday morning, as usual, he left the office about nine o'clock to get the morning mail. After receiving a package of letters and newspapers for *The Pioneer*, and Mr. Brinton, he said, deprecatingly:

"Nothing for me, I suppose?" and turned to go.

"Yes, Mr. Jewel, there's a letter here," said the clerk, and reaching to the general delivery box, she handed Ned an envelope postmarked Bay City, addressed in the same handwriting as the letter which had so dismayed the young man several weeks before.

Mr. Brinton and his foreman were driving homeward in the cool of the September evening just before sunset. The elder man, finding that his cheerful remarks on the trees, the approach of fall, the shortening days, and the prospects for the first winter on the farm, did not win response, had relapsed into silent speculation as to the cause of Ned's morose humor, which, he had noticed, was more pronounced than usual this evening. He had been thinking, of late, that perhaps it was his duty to get at the bottom of the trouble, whatever it might be; but how he was to do so if the young man refused his confidences, he was puzzled to know. It was evident that things could not long go on as at present. Mrs. Brinton had opened his eyes to some matters which worried him exceedingly, yet, as he watched from day to day, he could find no occasion to take anyone to task, and no opportunity to set things moving in a different channel. All at once Ned's voice, husky and uncertain, broke in upon his meditations.

"Mr. Brinton, do you suppose you could manage to advance me five hundred dollars on account of my salary?"

The editor started, wondering if he had heard aright. He looked at Ned in amazement, and saw that he was painfully embarrassed.

"What on earth do you want with five hundred dollars advance? I thought you had a comfortable little bank account of your own," he exclaimed.

"I—did have a little; but I—drew it out some time ago." Ned flushed hotly as he made the statement.

"Dear me! I'm sorry to hear that; you don't gamble, I hope? No, of course not," he added hastily, as he saw Ned's disclaimer before it was uttered, "you never are out anywhere; you wouldn't have the chance, anyhow. What is it? Surely you wouldn't ask me for such a large amount unless you are prepared to tell me why you need it."

"I—I'd rather not, just now—I have an obligation to meet—it's a personal matter."

"H'm—some debt you contracted before you came here, Ned?" Brinton spoke kindly, but with no thought of letting the matter drop simply because it was personal.

"Y-e-s, sir," replied Ned with great reluctance.

"I believe you told me last fall that you had once owed money to Mr. Winslow in Detroit. Has this five hundred anything to do with that debt?" asked Brinton.

"N—n—well—it relates to the same thing," admitted Ned, after a moment of hesitation.

"I'm glad to hear that," said Brinton, "because if it is something Mr. Winslow knew about, it can't be very bad, for he spoke highly of you. Still I think you ought to tell me, also. I can't see you eating your heart out over some secret trouble, to say nothing of

impoverishing yourself when you ought to be saving for the future, without making an effort to help you."

"Please don't urge me, Mr. Brinton; you have no idea how I hate to talk about it. I wouldn't have asked you for the money if there had been any way to avoid it; but I hoped it would be possible to advance me the amount. It would be only eight or nine months' salary—though, of course, I don't know what I would do about my board all that time." There was perplexity—almost despair—in the way he added the final remark. It was a complication that had just then, for the first time, occurred to him.

Brinton remained silent for some minutes before he replied. He was somewhat at a loss, himself, to know what he ought to do. He could see that the young man was burning with anxiety, and that he had staked everything upon the success of his petition. At length the editor declared that he must take time to consider the matter, and would try to let Ned know the following day what he could do. Before morning came, Brinton saw his way clearly. The time for hesitation was past. Already, he feared, he had delayed too long. A great light had burst upon him, as he thought; and the one who had supplied the illumination was Mrs. Brinton, though she had only her woman's intuition to guide her.

CHAPTER XXVI

THURSDAY was always a busy day in *The Pioneer* office. Saturday's paper went to press on Friday, and two of the forms were made up the day before. But work was never allowed to run behind, and there was seldom need for night work even toward the end of the week. Promptly at half past five, Ned Jewel rang the bell on his desk giving the signal to knock off for the day. Mr. Brinton had been standing by the big stone examining the forms for the two inside pages. He stepped over to Ned and said in a low tone.

"I'd like to see you in my office after the others go."

"Yes, sir," replied Ned, feeling his heart almost stand still. So much depended on the decision he had been awaiting all day, that the suspense made him sick. He washed up and put on his coat, prolonging the operation to give the men a chance to leave before he and Mr. Brinton should be ready. He was eager for the interview, yet dreaded it; and he eyed each one of the crew suspiciously to see if he had any inkling of the momentous affair, knowing at the same time that such a thing was unlikely, unless his own nervous behavior had furnished the clue. One by one the men departed, with brief "good-nights." Ned remained alone. The editor was in his sanctum with the door closed. That seemed to make the situation all the more embarrassing. There was something difficult—something ominous about that closed door. Why hadn't Mr. Brinton left it open, after asking him to come in? He waited nearly five minutes, fussing with this and that, to see if the

editor would come out. No; evidently he expected Ned to announce himself when ready. There was no help for it, apparently; he must take the initiative. He walked over to the corner of the printing room where the little editorial office was tucked away among piles of paper and cases of type and knocked at the door, though he had opened it many times without knocking. It was his privilege as foreman to use less ceremony than was expected of others.

"Come in," called Brinton, then as Ned opened the door, he added, "Oh, is that you, Ned? Come right in and sit down a minute. I just want to—" he arose as he spoke, and stepping to the door, turned the key in the lock. Then he removed the key and put it in his pocket, after which he resumed his seat. Ned watched the proceeding, too much astonished to speak. "That's to provide against intrusion," volunteered the editor, with a little laugh; then, as though he had not made the beginning he intended, his tone suddenly changed. "No, seriously, Ned, that's to prevent you from escaping until the matter in hand is settled. Sit down; don't stand on guard like that. I'm not going to hurt you. The time has come for you and me to have a thorough understanding with each other. There's something more than a trifle that you're worrying over. It's wearing you out and causing others anxiety. More than that, it is threatening to ruin you. It's wrong for you to keep it to yourself when you have a friend who can help you. I'm your friend, and now you're going to tell me all about the thing. That door will remain locked until you make a clean breast of the whole matter, if we stay here all night."

A feeling of utter panic and hopelessness settled over the young printer as he listened to the quietly spoken ultimatum of his employer and friend. He knew there

was no gainsaying the determined man confronting him when he spoke in that manner. He would have his way despite all opposition. If a vague sense of relief struggled to assert itself with the dismay, Ned was not in the least conscious of the fact. He fought against what he felt was the inevitable.

"I can't tell you any more than I have already," he exclaimed. "It's impossible. What's the use of tearing open an old sore? It can't do any good. It would only humiliate me."

"I'm inclined to think the sore doesn't require tearing open; it's open now, and bleeding," declared Brinton, still quiet and insistent. "It is taking your life blood. You can't cure it alone; you must have help, and mine seems to be the only human help available. Certainly nothing you tell me in confidence need humiliate you, if there is no dishonor to you in it."

Ned waited. The serious, kindly face of his friend appealed to him, but the habit of concealment was strong.

"I can't; you'd think ill of me," he said weakly.

"Not so ill as I may if you refuse to tell me, perhaps," said Brinton. "Can't you see that I must guess if I don't know? And my guess may be something worse than the reality. I am bound to draw conclusions that will fit the facts in my possession, but these facts may be misleading, and my conclusions may wrong you. In justice to yourself it is necessary to tell me all the truth."

Ned was quick to avail himself of the opportunity to deny the implication. It served to put off the main question. "I've done nothing dishonest, nothing dishonorable before I came to Midland. That I'm willing to swear to. You know all my life here. Nothing is concealed. Isn't that enough? I prefer not to open the past."

"But it is open; that's just the trouble. It's open and causing you serious trouble. You have been compelled, even, to come to me for financial assistance on account of it. I want to help you; but I can't do it without knowing the whole truth of the matter."

For a moment the young man sat drumming with his fingers on the edge of his chair. He was at the end of his excuses, and the case was desperate; yet his mouth refused to speak the secret it had kept so long.

"If you won't advance me the money on my salary, I suppose I'll have to try to borrow it some other way," he said with a degree of doggedness unusual to him; yet, as he spoke, he realized the hopelessness of trying to raise such a sum of money in Midland on his personal credit, if his employer refused it.

Brinton looked at his watch. "We'll have to stop beating about the bush, Ned, if we're going to get home tonight," he said briskly. "I told Mrs. Brinton we might be delayed, but I have no fancy to spend the night here. If you can't get started with your story, I shall have to help you. I am not blind—far from it. I have four good eyes, Mrs. Brinton's and my own, to see things with, and they can take in a good deal that goes on here and at home. Do you suppose your behavior at the farm this summer has passed unnoticed? You and Bessie develop marked affinities and hanker after each other's company. When that fact is plainly established to all—yourselves included, I believe, you suddenly evince a great dislike for the girl—or it seems more like fear of her or of yourself—and keep away from her, even to the extent of downright rudeness. It can't be that you made love to her, and she refused you, because she—well, because I have very good reason for knowing that no such thing took place. You let an uncouth, ignorant fellow—with full respect for his good heart—pay steady attention to Bessie and take

her favors before your eyes without protest, and draw still more into your shell, gloomy and silent, your eyes full of suffering like a dumb dog, although you must know perfectly well that Bessie tolerates the fellow with difficulty and would vastly prefer your company to his. All this must have a cause. Don't you suppose Mrs. Brinton and I have studied it out? Then, there's that letter you got last month. You imagined I didn't connect your dreadfully disturbed state of mind with the unusual fact of your receiving a letter? How could I do otherwise, when you refused any adequate explanation? What could a letter contain to upset you so? You tell me now, or you did last evening, that you drew your money out of the bank some time ago. I know you had several hundred dollars there this summer. The sudden depletion of your account must have been in connection with that disturbing letter, because there has been no other cause here, so far as I know, and you've assured me that I know all about your life here. Now you are in a state bordering on a collapse again, and come to me asking an advance of more than half a year's salary. This increased stress has developed since yesterday morning. What is the natural inference? You must have received another letter. Indeed, your recent anxiety to go for the mail yourself stands explained. You feared to have some expected letters fall into other hands than your own. Two conclusions, therefore, seem unavoidable: First, you are in love with Bessie, and fear to show or declare it because of some secret trouble of the past that is still hanging over and threatening you; second, someone is demanding money of you, and the demand is one you don't dare refuse; to accede to it, you give up your savings of the past two years at least, and try to mortgage your total earnings for months to come, leaving no provision whatever for your support during the period involved.

The demand, therefore, must be backed with a threat of exposure of something you wish concealed—in other words, it is blackmail. Tell me if I am reaching my conclusions too fast, or if they are wrong."

Ned Jewel was silent. He had been listening as one fascinated. He had nothing to say.

"Now to dig this matter out," continued Brinton. "Do you still owe Mr. Winslow money?"

"No, sir," said Ned hoarsely. His throat was so dry that he coughed slightly.

"I thought so," declared the editor. "Mr. Winslow would never resort to such tactics to collect an old debt. Have you any promissory notes out, or any old bills unpaid?"

"No, sir," replied Ned again.

"Just as I thought," Brinton answered. "Such debts would have been paid long ago. But we must connect the demands for money, or rather the affair which made such demands possible, with your treatment of poor little Bessie, and also, by the way, with your strange attempt to leave the farm almost as soon as you were comfortably established there. You never gave me any satisfactory reason for that sudden whim on your part." Brinton paused, with his searching eyes resting on Ned's face, as he considered how to proceed. The young man moved uneasily but remained silent.

"Ned, are you in love with Bessie Carroll?" asked Brinton, abruptly.

No answer.

"Is there something in your past life that makes you afraid of such a love—that would make it wrong?"

Still no answer; but Ned was evidently in torment.

"Ned Jewel, I want a straight answer, yes or no—are you married?"

The young man sprang to his feet with a quick gasp and began to walk back and forth in the little office like

a goaded animal in a cage. Brinton's eyes were full of pity, but he went on with quiet persistence.

"You could easily say 'no,' Ned, if it were not so; your silence is admission. Come, out with the whole sorry business like a man. Concealment is worse than useless now."

"I suppose I must," groaned Ned at length. "But it's only to you. If I tell you everything, you'll promise not to tell it to anyone else? I'll agree to whatever you say, if you'll promise that."

"Very well, Ned, I promise that it shall go no further without your consent."

"Well, it's just as you've guessed. I *am* married. My wife ran away from me four years ago, when I lived in Detroit. I've never seen her nor heard from her since, until about a month ago when she wrote asking for money. And now she has written again for more, and I haven't got it to send, and I can't borrow it, and she is bound to make more trouble if I don't. I declare I'm at my wit's end what to do."

"You ought to have told me long ago, Ned. Much of this trouble would have been avoided." Brinton spoke very seriously. He felt that Ned's conduct merited reproof, but he realized that reproof now could accomplish nothing. "We must make the best of the bad matter as it stands. Give me the whole story."

"I was lonesome—no parents—no family—nothing but work. I met the girl and married her after too short an acquaintance. We went to housekeeping. The furniture I could afford to buy wasn't good enough for her. I bought more expensive things and gave a year's note for part of the bill. Our tastes were not alike. I couldn't gratify her expensive desires, although I went into debt trying to do it. I worked overtime to earn enough extra money to meet my notes. When they were coming due and I had scraped the

money together, she wanted to use it for something else. One morning she was gone; the money I had saved to pay my debts was gone. I found a note on the dressing table saying that she had met a former friend who was better able to provide for her comforts and pleasures, and that as she found she could not care for me, poor, she had decided to go with her friend and relieve me of the necessity of making my small income take care of us both. She said, also, that since I wouldn't be burdened with her in the future, of course I wouldn't begrudge the paltry sum she had taken with her. It was about three hundred dollars. I had no clue as to where she went, or with whom she went. Very soon I found that she had contracted bills in my name wherever she could in town. I defaulted on the note for the house furnishings, but paid it off by installments. Mr. Winslow loaned me money to pay some of the debts. I kept my house as it was for awhile thinking my wife would come back. I tried every way I could think of to get a trace of her. Then I sold my stuff for what I could get and went to a cheap boarding house until I got all the debts paid off and Mr. Winslow's loan returned. After that I came here. I couldn't bear to stay where folks knew me. All that time I never heard from my wife. I thought she had gone out of my life; but I was wrong." A subdued bitterness, a tone of utter hopelessness made Ned's dreary tale sound even more melancholy.

"You heard from her a month ago?" asked Brinton.

"Yes. I had a letter; it came from Saginaw. She said she was destitute; that the man had left her, and she was sick. She said she wouldn't bother me by coming back, because she supposed I wouldn't want her, and because she didn't love me enough to play the penitent wife, and she knew we couldn't be happy together. But she must have some help, and I was the

only one she could ask for it; if I would send her enough to live on she wouldn't bother me in my life here. It sounded just like her. I knew she was right in saying we couldn't live together again. I dreaded even to see her. The thought of her coming here to Midland almost made me sick. I sent her some money and told her it was all I had, and that I hoped never to hear from her again; but that if she made it necessary, I should apply for a divorce."

Brinton made a gesture of repugnance and protest, but Ned did not appear to notice it, and went on in the same monotonous tone.

"I knew very well when I sent her the money that she would probably ask for more as soon as that was gone, and I intended to send what I could out of my salary rather than have the humiliation of bringing her here. I had no idea she would deliberately try to ruin me, but now she writes from Bay City demanding five hundred dollars, and insists if I haven't got it I must borrow it. She says she has a chance to go into business and earn her own living in partnership with a dressmaker, but she does not say where, and tells me she can get letters at Bay City for a few days only. She says that if I help start her this once she will never bother me again, either for money or in any way; but that if I don't, her last chance to lead an honest life will be gone and she will be driven to worse wrong doing, or else be compelled to come here and claim support as my wayward but repentant wife. That's the thing that confronts me now. I got that letter yesterday. If I don't send the money this week, you can see what is bound to happen. I can see nothing else to do but go to Detroit, secure a divorce, and then go to some other part of the country to hide the shame of it all where nobody knows me—and nobody cares."

"Poor fellow, you certainly have had tough luck; and

what you've told me is not your worst trouble, either, I'm afraid," said Brinton. He was genuinely disturbed by his foreman's story, and at a loss how to help him in so desperate a plight. While he spoke words of sympathy and waited further confidences, he was searching his own mind for a way of escape, or at least the most helpful counsel to offer the unfortunate youth. From his own observations and what Mrs. Brinton had told him he was quite sure Ned had not unbosomed himself of his worst trouble.

"No, I haven't!" exclaimed Ned passionately. "You may as well know the whole bitter truth. I love Bessie Carroll with every drop of blood in my body. I feel like a criminal. I was afraid as soon as I saw her that it would happen, although I had believed it impossible that any woman could arouse the passion again; but I found it had never been aroused before. Bessie was so different; she seemed like the other half of myself. I was frightened that first Sunday, when I went over the farm with her. She was so natural, so much like my own heart and mind in another body, so close and intimate, as if we had always been together, and always were to be. I never had such a feeling before; it frightened me. That's why I tried to leave the farm; but I didn't dare to tell you. I suppose I was a coward. I ought to have told you, I know; but, instead, I was glad when you refused to let me leave. I wanted to stay, although I knew I ought to go. I enjoyed the indulgence that I knew had only bitterness and agony at the end. In fact, the agony came right along with the delight; it didn't wait till the end, because all the time my eyes were open, and I knew what I was doing. I've been in hell this past summer, and all the time it looked like paradise. The very taste of the paradise that I knew didn't belong to me turned to wormwood in my mouth. I fought against it every night and yielded

again every day. I had thought myself an honest man, and found myself a scoundrel. Thank God, he didn't let me drag that beautiful, true-hearted girl down with me. Even the fate that seemed to await her isn't so bad as to fall in love with such a man as I am. It is torture to me to see her accept another man's attentions, especially one so unfitted for her, but I've been trying to welcome it, because it seemed the only escape for me, and perhaps for her, from the desperate straits into which my own wretched folly was heading us. Now you know it all. There isn't anything more to tell. There'll never be any escape for me, because no matter how far I go I can never get away from the sight of the happiness I tasted only to know it wasn't for me; but I can at least avoid bringing trouble to Bessie."

"Let us hope so; but I'm afraid you've waited too long; the trouble may be already made," said Brinton.

"No, you are wrong there, Mr. Brinton; you must be wrong," urged Ned. "Bessie is wholly taken up with Caleb Trimmer now-a-days, and doesn't notice me at all." In spite of himself there was a note of complaint in the last few words.

Mr. Brinton restrained himself from answering as the truth of the matter prompted. If Ned believed his own words, so much the better—let him continue in such belief. "You may well hope so," he said. "In the mean time, it will be wise for you to act upon your own suggestion of six months ago and withdraw, at least for the present, from Oakdale. You can get board in the village. It isn't easy to decide what to do about the other matter. Have you the letters you received from your wife? May I see them?"

"I have the last one; the one I got last month and the one she left when she ran away are in my room."

Ned drew out a letter from his pocket and handed it to the editor, who examined it closely, and then read

it through slowly. It was written in a somewhat cramped, school-girl style, and showed some deficiency in education.

"There is no way to know whether the woman is telling the truth or not. The chances are she is not; but after all, that isn't the main point. Shall we send her the money, or shall we ignore the demand and let her turn up here? Either way would be difficult, and the whole thing savors too much of blackmail to suit me."

"Why couldn't I go to Detroit and secure a divorce? The three letters I have from her ought to be enough to prove my right to it without anything else."

Again Brinton made a sign of disapproval. "Have nothing to do with that device of the devil, Ned. It can't undo the past, nor can it save you humiliation now. The whole story would come out just the same. You can imagine with what relish Bartley would print it with his own amplifications. Besides, I think divorce is a moral sin almost second to bigamy."

"Bartley is pretty sure to get hold of the matter either way," said Jewel; "but I should be out of his reach. Of course, I couldn't stay here. The only thing that I would gain by the divorce would be freedom from her demands for money."

"No, you can't cure one wrong with another, Ned. Let divorce alone; and don't try to run away from your trouble. Such a show of weakness will only make it worse. The only right way, I believe, is to face it like a man, and make the best of a bad matter."

"But what about the money?"

"I don't think you ought to try to send her such a large amount when you haven't it. Write and tell her exactly what you are able to do, and agree to give her a definite allowance from your earnings if she needs it for her support, but refuse positively to go into

debt. Tell her it can make no difference in the amount you are able to pay her if she comes here to trouble you, except that it might lessen your earning capacity and so reduce her allowance. She may decide to take what you offer and let you alone. If she doesn't, we shall have to meet other developments as they come; but stand your ground. The knowledge that you have done no wrong yourself ought to make you strong. Whatever comes, you can depend on me to stand by you, Ned, as long as you remain true to your own manhood."

"Thank you, Mr. Brinton, I'll follow your advice; but you won't let Bessie know?"

"No one shall learn anything about the matter through me. Set your mind at rest on that score. We'll bring up the subject of your return to the village, in a casual way, as the natural thing to do at the end of the summer. You can have your room at Mrs. Plimpton's engaged for the beginning of next week. That will give you time to move without too great appearance of haste. Now we must hurry, or the folks will begin to wonder." Brinton arose and unlocked the office door. Ned held out his hand.

"I believe you're right, Mr. Brinton," he said earnestly, "and I'm ever so much obliged to you. It really seems as if the secret was less crushing since I've told it to you. It will be awfully hard to stand the thought that any day, perhaps, the thing may be known and gossiped about all over town, but it's worth a good deal to have such a friend as you to stand by me and help me face it. I would have been sure to make a still worse fool of myself, if you hadn't forced me to tell you."

As the editor gripped hard the hand of his unhappy young friend, and laid his left hand affectionately on his shoulder, he said in a voice full of sympathy and

encouragement, "That's the right spirit, my boy. The harm's done, and can't be undone, but you can brace up and do your part like a man, and remember that nothing need cause you to fear nor hang your head if you do the right thing yourself, because 'the righteous are bold as a lion.'"

CHAPTER XXVII

A SURPRISE awaited Mr. Brinton and Ned Jewel at Oakdale. As Teenie put their supper on the table—the others having eaten and departed nearly an hour earlier—Mrs. Brinton said, "Bessie has gone to spend a few days with Mr. and Mrs. Hawkins. She has been looking tired and droopy the last few weeks, and I thought a little change and rest would do her good. They'll bring her back Saturday evening."

The two men looked at each other significantly. Their glances seemed to say, "So much the easier to pass over the remainder of the week here"; but Brinton replied aloud, "I'm glad you let her go; the poor little girl has been working too hard; a longer vacation would be still better."

Ned said nothing. He was wondering what Bessie would say when he told her that he was going to leave Oakdale, and whether she would care. Mrs. Brinton took his announcement very quietly, assuring Ned that she was very sorry to have anything take him away, but asking few questions, and so the matter rested until Sunday. An entertainment Saturday evening in the village kept the young people late. Sam and Lettie drove Bessie to the farm after the entertainment and returned immediately to their own home in town. Not until the next day at dinner was any mention made of Ned's departure on the morrow. Mr. Brinton was praising Bessie's green-apple pie made from apples just gathered in the orchard.

"Can you get such good pie at Mrs. Plimpton's, Ned?" he asked casually.

"No sir—nowhere on earth," was Ned's answer, given with explosive force; but he did not look up.

"Well, you'd better have another piece then for good luck," said Brinton. "Bessie, you want to give Mr. Jewel an extra piece of this extra fine pie to remember Oakdale by. He won't find such superfine crust and such prime filling when he gets back to his boarding house in the village."

Bessie gazed from Mr. Brinton to Ned with wide open eyes. "What do you mean?" she asked. "He can have all he wants here."

"Yes, but he won't be here after tomorrow morning. He told us last Thursday evening that he thought it was time for him to be getting back to town after his summer in the country."

"Oh, no! you don't mean that, Mr. Jewel? You're not going to leave Oakdale?"

"Yes, Miss Bessie, I must. I've had a long summer here. Now I must say good-by, and try to be satisfied with Mrs. Plimpton's again." Ned tried hard to make his reply sound natural and genuine, but he was conscious of a pitiful lack of these very qualities, and he was not alone in that consciousness. Bessie made no further comment. The others at the table listened interestedly, but offered no remarks.

In the afternoon came Caleb with flying colors; and Bessie went meekly with him to ride behind Rob Roy as she had promised. Caleb was in high spirits, as well as in gorgeous attire. He had been telling himself ever since he woke that morning that this was a great day in the life of Caleb Trimmer. With every repetition his emphasis and his confidence in his own prophecy increased. Certainly the latter should not fail through any lack of purpose or application on his part. Rob Roy, also, was sleek and mettlesome. He seemed to share in the consciousness of his driver that the occa-

sion was one of importance and called for style and display. Bessie remarked admiringly on Rob Roy's shining coat and well-combed mane and tail.

"You bet they're fine," replied Caleb proudly. "They oughter be; I spent the hull mornin' groomin' 'im. They ain't a slicker horse in Midland County than Rob Roy—but how 'bout me? Ye didn't notice my new suit an' hat."

Bessie tried to suppress a smile. "Oh, yes! of course I did, Mr. Trimmer, the minute I came out of the house. How could I help noticing them? They'd attract attention anywhere. I feel quite insignificant beside them."

"Ye needn't feel that way, Miss Bessie"—Caleb thought he could afford to be generous now that his own magnificence had been acknowledged—"That white dress o' your'n, with them ribbons, an' thet bonnet, an' parasol, is awful tart; besides, I always did think you was an allfired pretty gal."

"Thank you, Mr. Trimmer; but you mustn't flatter." There was enough of reproof in the tone to make the youth look around in surprise.

"No?" he queried, more than half incredulous, "Most girls like to be told they're pretty."

"You seem to have a lot of experience."

"Oh—some; but," he added hastily, "thet don't count now; I ain't fickle. When I tell a gal I'll stick to her, I'll stick till death. I ain't never told thet to any gal—not yet," with significant emphasis on the last two words.

The buckboard gave a sudden bound into the air and nearly threw its passengers to the ground. "Drat thet stump!" exclaimed Caleb, giving the line a jerk. "Git into the road there, Rob Roy; can't ye see nothin'?"

"I guess he isn't used to this meadow road," said Bes-

sie. "It winds a good deal; you'd better watch sharp."

"Jes' so," said Caleb; but his eyes immediately turned back to the girl at his side. "Es I was sayin'—I—er—what was it I was sayin' when that pesky stump shut me up?"

"Why, really, Mr. Trimmer, I don't believe I could repeat it, now, myself."

"Call me Caleb; it sounds nicer, an' ain't so formal—what ye stoppin' there for Rob Roy?"

"I suppose he is waiting for you to open the gate," said Bessie.

"Why, sure!" exclaimed Caleb, springing to the ground as he spoke. "I hed no idee we'd come to the end o' the farm already."

Bessie called to him as he unhooked the gate, "Wait a minute, please, Mr. Trimmer. Where are you going to drive?"

"Oh, most anywhere. I thought o' drivin' down to Bay City over the Beaver Town Road."

"Oh, no! that's too far. It's at least eighteen miles each way. We wouldn't get back till very late. Besides it would be too much for the horse."

"Needn't worry 'bout Rob Roy; he's good for twice the trip."

"Well, it's entirely too far; it must be nearly three o'clock now. Why not drive down to Midland and along the river, or out the Bullock Creek road? Either way would be a nice drive."

"Spose we can, if you say so." Caleb was plainly disappointed at not being permitted to take the longer trip, which would bring them back after dark—a time much more favorable for the purpose he had in mind. When he held open the gate, Bessie drove through into the State road and turned the horse's head toward Midland. The young man sent one long-

ing look in the opposite direction as he resumed the reins, and then obediently started Rob Roy off to the South. "Gals will hev their own way; no use to cross 'em," he mused, readjusting his plan to suit daylight conditions.

"I tell ye, this is great! I could keep a-goin' like this with you an' Rob Roy forever, ef I hed my way," he exclaimed, sitting back in his seat and holding the lines taut, as his gelding warmed up to a smart pace on the well-known State road.

"Wouldn't you get hungry?" asked Bessie smiling.

"Maybe I would, but it don't seem so now—when I look at you," and he backed up his words with a soulful look of adoration.

"Nonsense, Mr. Trimmer, you mustn't talk like that." Bessie laughed uncomfortably. She scented danger ahead.

"All right; why don't ye call me Caleb like I asked ye to? Won't ye, please?"

"Oh, no, that would be too familiar; I'd rather not."

"But thet's jest what I want ye to be—familiar," he urged. "'Mr. Trimmer' sounds so awful formal, like as if we weren't good friends."

"You mustn't feel that way about it. We can be good friends, just the same, even if I do say 'Mr. Trimmer,' and it's more proper."

"I'd a heap ruther ye wouldn't be so terrible proper," Caleb declared, and then, fearing that he had said something offensive, he added, hastily, "Do ye like candy, Miss Bessie?"

"Yes, indeed, I do," replied the girl, relieved to think her companion had given up an embarrassing subject of conversation.

"Glad of it; I got some here; bought it special to give ye," and Caleb brought a paper bag out of his

pocket with one hand while he held the lines with the other.

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Trimmer; how thoughtful of you!"

The young fellow fumbled in the bag, examining several pieces, and presently handed Bessie a small heart-shaped lozenge. She smiled politely and put the candy into her mouth.

"Ye didn't read what it said!" expostulated Caleb, much disappointed.

"No; did you want me to?" asked Bessie, innocently.

"Why, o' course! thet's what they're for," he exclaimed. "I'll hev to find another o' the same kind," and forthwith he began examining again the contents of the paper bag. "Don't see one jest like it; but here's one most es good," he said, holding out the lozenge with its motto right side up so that Bessie could not fail to read it. The word "Sweetheart" was lettered in red across the center. Bessie looked at it a moment and then laughed a little.

"I see—that's a joke," she said; "this is a heart, and it's sweet because it's made of sugar."

"No, that ain't what it means. You ought to know—"

"Look out, Mr. Trimmer! we're going into the ditch!"

Caleb had unconsciously let go of one line, and the horse, responding to the other, was swerving into the deep gutter. With a jump, the young man caught the loose rein just as it was slipping out of reach.

"I think you'd better attend to your driving more closely, Mr. Trimmer, and let the candies wait. We'll be upset the next time," Bessie declared somewhat tartly.

"Pshaw! don't be afraid o' that. The line slipped, thet's all. Why, I can drive Rob Roy with my eyes

shut. I've driv 'im many a time with the lines round my neck." The words were intended to be reassuring, but they had the opposite effect on his companion.

"For heaven's sake! What would you hold the reins like that for? I hope you're not going to try any such tricks here."

"Oh, it ain't dangerous; it's jest convenient when your hands—when ye want to—I mean when it's dark an' ye hev a—a—oh, you know what I mean." It suddenly occurred to him that it would hardly be the wise thing to tell a girl he wanted to propose to about his love-makings with other girls.

"You talk as if you didn't know yourself what you mean, and I'm sure I don't. Whatever it is, please don't do it while I'm with you." Bessie began to wish they were on the way home instead of only fairly started on their ride. Couldn't Caleb talk sensibly for once? How different it would be if— An impatience to get back to the farm possessed her. The time was so short; it was too bad to waste such a beautiful afternoon.

"Are we nearly to Midland, Mr. Trimmer?" she asked, turning her head suddenly, as she felt Caleb's ardent gaze resting upon her. The young fellow blushed, feeling that she must have read what was in his mind.

"'Bout a mile an' a half or two miles. Ye ain't in a hurry, are ye? I wisht it was ten times es far."

"I was wondering," was all she said.

Caleb felt that he was not making as good progress in the great business of the day as he wished. Rob Roy was covering the ground more rapidly than his driver. The love-sick swain was afraid to put off the momentous affair until near the end of their drive, because it might not be possible to get to the climax before time to go into the house, and then the family

would be around. It would be best to begin at once, he thought.

"Won't ye hev another candy—Bessie?" he asked, hesitating a little as he dropped the Miss before her name.

"No, thank you, Mr. Trimmer, not just now. Let's watch the country as we go along. It's beautiful, isn't it?"

"I'd ruther watch you, 'cause you're ever so much more beautiful," he blurted out.

"Hush, Mr. Trimmer, you mustn't talk like that—see there! look at that dear little bunny sitting in the road ahead of us!"

"Bother the rabbits; I wan't to look at you. I can't help it, if I say what's true. I've been dyin' to say it, I don't know how long. You're jest too sweet for anything; I'm jest crazy to kiss ye, so there!" He poured out his words in anxious haste, partly to prevent interruption, and partly as a spur to his own courage. He believed Bessie was really willing to listen, and that her objections were only the same kind of coquettishness that he had seen in other girls of his acquaintance. Even her sharp retort did not open his eyes.

"Caleb Trimmer, if you can't stop talking such nonsense, I'll have to ask you to take me right home."

A languishing sigh was the only response to this pointed rebuke. The young man remembered that asking for a kiss was usually the poorest way to get one. "Gals likes to be taken by surprise, without givin' 'em a chance to say 'no,'" he mused, and then he glanced sideways at Bessie again. Somehow she seemed different from all the other girls he knew. When they pretended to be mad, they really looked as if they wanted a fellow to keep on. Bessie looked as if she really meant what she said; but perhaps it was only

because she was so much prettier than the others. How sweet she did look sitting beside him under her dainty parasol, with just the trace of a pout on those tempting red lips. Caleb felt his heart leap almost into his throat. Would he dare? He took a deep breath. Why should he be so frightened? It wasn't such a terrible thing to kiss a pretty girl. He had never quailed in such a crisis before. Surely, now that he "meant business," he could well afford to be bold. Gathering the lines in his right hand he carelessly rested his left elbow on the back of the seat. In a few moments his arm slipped along the back—unconsciously, it seemed. Apparently he had become reconciled to thoughts of commonplace things along the road.

"See thet there squirrel runnin' up thet oak tree?" he asked, nodding his head to indicate the direction.

"Yes, isn't he quick?" said Bessie.

"Quicker'n greased lightnin', an' so'm I," cried Caleb, but he found to his sorrow that something else was quicker still. Bessie had grown suspicious and was on the alert. The instant Caleb's left arm tightened and he ducked forward to steal the coveted kiss, Bessie's parasol tipped down edgewise between them, and received the full force and fervor of Caleb's wholehearted smack. As if this was not enough, the rod caught his new soft hat and sent it flying into the road behind them.

"Aren't you ashamed of yourself, Mr. Trimmer! How dare you try to do such a thing?" cried Bessie, her anger greatly tempered by the poor fellow's humiliating failure. She wanted to laugh, but restrained herself; Caleb might misconstrue it into tolerance. "I'm half a mind to get out this minute and walk back home alone," she added severely.

The poor fellow was much ruffled and confused as well as disappointed; but he could not think of letting her

carry out such a dreadful threat. "Don't do that, Miss Bessie," he begged. "I hed no idee ye'd get so mad. I jest couldn't help it, ye looked so sweet. I won't do it again ef ye'll promise not to be mad."

"Well, you'd better stop Rob Roy and go back for your hat. It must be a quarter of a mile up the road by now," replied the girl. Caleb comforted himself, as he walked back with the thought that her voice didn't sound so very angry.

Meanwhile, Bessie sat still in the buckboard, holding the reins. It was certainly the last drive she should take with Caleb Trimmer, she told herself. It was evident that he had mistaken her attitude toward him. He must be disillusioned at once. Involuntarily, her hand pulled on the reins, and Rob Roy, taking it as a signal to go, started off at a rapid pace. He hated to stand still in the road. Bessie immediately drew in the lines tight and called to the horse to "whoa!" but Rob Roy had no intention of stopping again at the command of an unfamiliar voice. He increased his speed. Bessie looked back to where Caleb was, away up the road. He had just picked up his hat and was carefully dusting it with his handkerchief. She waved to him to hurry, and then gave all her attention to the horse, who refused to stop. The fun of it began to get into her veins. Caleb would think she was running away from him on purpose to punish him; he would think the signal she had waved back at him was a good-by. Well, she couldn't help it. Let him follow on foot; it would serve him right. Midland couldn't be much more than a mile farther, and if she did not succeed in stopping Rob Roy before then, he would probably stop of his own accord in the village.

A buckboard with two men passed her. She did not know either of them, but they stared curiously at her. As she neared the village, other rigs, and several pedes-

trians passed, more than one eyeing her with marked interest. Was it so unusual, then, to see a young woman driving alone? All of a sudden it ocurred to her that doubtless these people recognized Caleb's horse and buckboard. She blushed with annoyance. What would they think, especially if they should meet Caleb running after her? How would he explain the situation? It was positively exasperating, and yet Rob Roy kept on, giving her all she could do to hold him straight in the road.

The situation certainly was exasperating to Caleb. No other thought came to his mind than that Bessie was deliberately leaving him on the road because she was vexed at what he had done. He never imagined for an instant that Rob Roy was running away. But why did the girl wave her hand at him so saucily if she was angry? It must have been just pure maliciousness. She wanted him to know that she had the best of him and was not afraid to take advantage of the situation. How far she would carry her prank he had no way of knowing, but he started to run after her until he saw another buckboard approaching; then he slowed down to a leisurely walk as if nothing were happening.

"Plague take it, ef that ain't Charlie an' Manny! Spose they saw Bessie," he muttered disgustedly as the rig drew near. On the impulse of the moment he took a step toward the brush at the side of the road to hide until they had passed; but it was too late—the men had recognized him.

"For the land sake, Caleb! What's happened now? Wasn't that your rig we passed just now with a pretty girl drivin' alone?" called out Manny, pulling up just before Caleb came abreast. Before the poor fellow could think of an answer, Charlie See let fly at him with the inevitable rimes.

"An awful pretty gal we saw a-drivin' down the road;
A horse an' yaller buckboard, too, with only half a load.
Be you the other half a load, friend Caleb? Tell me true
Just why the maiden pushed you out. By gum I pity you!"

"Didn't nobody push me out; I jest lost my hat an' got out to pick it up," grumbled Caleb, without stopping.

"You mean to say the girl was so glad to be relieved of your company that she drove on without you? I never would have thought it. Who is she, Caleb?" asked Manny.

"Ef ye don't know, I reckon I don't hev to tell ye."

"Certainly not, but what will the other girls say? I'll bet Susie Anderson will make you tell."

Caleb had passed them and was hurrying on to avoid explanations, but as Manny shouted his last question after him, he stopped short, and then hurried back.

"Ef ye go tellin' 'round about this, Manny, you're no friend o' mine, thet's all; an' you, too, Charlie. What's the use tryin' to make a feller feel cheap? I never done nothin' to you." Caleb was actually begging. He didn't want to lose Bessie, and have the Midland girls down on him also.

"All right, Caleb, we'll keep it mum if we can," declared Charlie See good-naturedly. "But you can't always help things poppin' out when you don't mean it."

One or two other acquaintances spoke to him on the way, but he refused to offer any explanation and avoided looking at passers-by in order to escape greetings. Before he had walked the mile or more to Midland his ardor for lovemaking had cooled. It was a pretty mean trick to go off like that and make a fool of him, even if she was such a pretty girl. He hadn't done such a terrible thing after all. Plenty of girls would like to be kissed on the sly, and he knew where

to find some of them, too. Bessie must have known he was sweet on her, he told himself, calling, as he had, every week for the last four or five months; and, knowing it, she had consented to go driving alone with him. What did she expect? He had a perfect right to make love to her if he wanted to, and she ought to treat the matter more seriously.

At every turn in the road he looked ahead, hopeful of seeing the runaway girl with his horse and buckboard waiting for him in some shady spot. No such welcome sight greeted him, however, and even as he came to the village he looked in vain up and down Main Street. Disconsolately, he made his way to the stable to inquire if anything had been seen or heard of his rig. There stood Rob Roy tied to the outside post, and there in the buckboard sat Bessie Carroll, as pretty as a picture, talking with old Mr. Rounds.

"Wall, Caleb, Rob Roy ran off an' left ye in the lurch, didn't 'e? That was pretty mean," called out Rounds, as soon as he saw the young fellow coming.

"Oh, Mr. Trimmer," cried Bessie excitedly, "I didn't do it on purpose! You didn't think I did, I hope? I'm sorry you had such a long walk. Rob Roy started up of his own accord, and he wouldn't stop for me. I tried all the way here to stop him, but he paid no attention to me in the least."

She looked so sweet and so full of charming regret as she explained, that her simple-hearted admirer forgot on the instant all his resentment, and felt more than ever determined to win the girl if he could. There was no doubt about it at all—she was not only different from all the other girls he knew, but unspeakably superior to them. How he could have thought for a single moment that she would do a mean thing was more than he could understand.

"Don't mention it, Miss Bessie. I ain't tired. O'

course I know ye didn't do it a-purpose. Rob Roy's a rascal; he won't mind nobody but me." He unfastened the tie rope as he spoke. "We might 's well be goin' on, I spose," and in another moment they were spinning away through the village and out into the river road toward the south. If only he could meet Manny and Charlie now, he thought, it would stop their tongues for sure. He would take care to let them know the very next time he should see them that it had been nothing but the merest accident. For some minutes he drove on without speaking. He hoped Bessie would speak first; but she showed no intention of doing so. At length the silence began to be embarrassing. He began somewhat uncertainly:

"Ye ain't mad, are ye, Bessie?"

"Not exactly mad, Mr. Trimmer, but I was vexed at what you did. You mustn't ever do such a thing again." Bessie spoke quietly and kindly, but there was a note of decision in her voice not to be misunderstood.

"But why?" urged Caleb desperately. "I didn't mean no harm, honest, I didn't. 'Twan't jest foolin'. It meant thet I—thet I—wait a minute; I got two o' them little heart candies thet I picked out special for you, cause they say jest the very things I wanted to say to you today, only they say it better'n I can. I got 'em right here." As he was talking, he took out of his waistcoat pocket a small package. The wrapper was a piece of white writing paper, and inside were two of the motto candies. "See, Bessie," he said in a pleading tone, holding the candies in front of her; but she turned her face away.

"I don't want to see, Mr. Trimmer, and I don't want to hear you talk like that. You mustn't—please."

"But I must," persisted the young man earnestly. The beginning had been made, and he meant to see the thing through now at any cost. "Ef ye won't read

'em, I'll hev to read 'em to ye myself. One says: 'I love you,' an' 'tother says, 'Will you be mine?' Them candies was made for us, an' I mean every word on 'em. I want ye the worst kind. Ye're the prettiest gal I know, an' jest as sweet es sugar. Will ye hev me, Bessie? I'm gettin' forty dollars a month now, an' Rounds says he'll raise me when I git married—oh, Bessie, don't turn away, so! Please say yes." He leaned toward her and placed his broad freckled hand over her little one with an imploring motion.

"I can't, Mr. Trimmer, oh, really, I can't; please don't urge me." There was a plaintiveness about the girl's reply that Caleb could not understand. He thought she meant that she would like to say "yes," but that something prevented her.

"Why can't ye, Bessie? Mr. Brinton wouldn't hinder ye, would he? He's always acted 's if he liked me well enough."

"Oh, it isn't that at all. The trouble is with me," she said with increasing candor.

"Then I don't see why ye can't. If ye want to live on a farm, I reckon I can manage to git one somehow, an' ye can hev all the pets an' flowers ye like."

"But—"

"An' ye needn't hev none of 'em killed for eatin'," he interrupted hastily in the hope of overcoming that troublesome "but."

"Oh, you don't understand, Mr. Trimmer; I'm so sorry. Can't you see that it's necessary to have—love before one can be married? I—"

"But I do love ye, Bessie. Didn't I jest tell ye so?"

"Yes, but one isn't enough; both must feel the same way, and I—I don't love you, Mr. Trimmer—there, please don't feel so bad. I'm sorry to hurt you."

The blank, stunned look which appeared on Caleb's honest face had brought out her last soothing remark,

but he appeared not to notice it. The one fact that she did not love him was all he could grasp. That part of the question had not seriously worried him in making his plans.

"Don't ye?" he said. "I thought maybe—thet is, I hoped ye did. Pr'aps I oughter waited a little longer."

"It wouldn't do any good."

"I don't know. Ye can't always tell. I spose I'll hev to try, anyhow." A sort of quiet despair in which a touch of hope and dogged persistence was mingled sounded in his words.

"Please don't, Mr. Trimmer; it would only hurt us both. I really couldn't love you enough for that. Please don't speak of it again—and, really, I think we'd better be going home now. I promised Mrs. Brinton we'd be back before supper."

Without a word the young man turned his horse in the direction of Oakdale. There was no use discussing the matter any more now. Perhaps some other time; he would see how she acted toward him. As he drew up before the farmhouse, he said in a low, determined tone. "I guess I was too sudden, Bessie. I'll hev to give ye time—an' try again, when ye git to like me better."

CHAPTER XXVIII

Staying to supper with the family for policy's sake and good victuals was one thing; but spending an evening with a girl who has just bestowed a full-sized mitten was quite another matter. Caleb could endure the one; the other he concluded would be uncomfortable as well as unnecessary. With scant ceremony, therefore, he made his adieus very soon after supper. When Brinton invited him to stay and sing awhile he explained that he wanted to get back to the village before dark.

"Oh, I see; there's a full moon tonight," was Brinton's comment.

"Maybe he wants to call on another girl this evening," suggested John Carroll, with a sly look at Bessie. He was not quite sure as to his sister's real feelings, but he doubted that Caleb occupied any considerable place in her thoughts.

"Come, children," called Mrs. Brinton from her place at the melodeon; but the best singers failed to respond. Ned Jewel had disappeared as soon as supper was over. Caleb, who could carry an air strenuously, was hurrying away. Bessie explained that she didn't feel much like singing tonight, and excused herself for the evening. The old folks, reinforced by Teenie, sometimes from the kitchen, and sometimes from the doorway, where she stood wiping a dish, and by John Carroll, Dave, and Percy, each in his own limited fashion, sang the well-known hymns right loyally until one after another reached his limit of endurance and dropped out, and the singing was over, the lamps were lit, the evening slipped away—but all was not well.

There were other things more urgent for Bessie that night. It was all very well to be a song-bird when there were no mysteries to solve, no mistakes to prevent, no demands of the heart to heed. To cope with such matters the song-bird must give way to the woman. It was the woman who hid herself in a cloak to keep out the chill night air of early fall, and stole away from the house in the twilight before the rising of the moon. She did not know where she was going; she only knew that the time was short, and that something must be said between a man and a woman before it was too late. Hurriedly she made the round of the stables, the sheep fold, the poultry yards—the man was a lover of animals and might go to them for communion. Dan poked his nose out of his stall, but received only a passing caress instead of the sugar lump he expected. No man was there. Up and down the road she looked, hastily. Nothing in either direction interested her. Back to the west beaver meadow the cloaked woman flitted like a shadow. Off in the distance another shadow seemed to be moving slowly. She followed without delay. Foolish convention must give way for the present. The urgent affair of the moment could not be hampered. By hurrying, she gained on the shadow ahead until she saw it entering the woods—in the direction of the dam. Then she hesitated. She had no fear of the woods or the darkness. More than once she had wandered into their silent recesses on summer nights. But to follow a man—even this man—there, at such a time. The shadow ahead of her had disappeared. Tomorrow the man would go away from her—suffering, mistaken, unknowing. Now was the time to say what must be said, if ever. She hurried boldly on, sure of her safety, because sure of his manhood.

Ned Jewel sat on a fallen tree by the beaver dam, moodily watching the white light of the rising moon

grow brighter in the little clearing. Some water still trickled over the edge of the dam, although the brook had dwindled during the summer to a tiny thread through the meadow and along the ridge. This would be his last visit to the charmed spot. His first visit had been with her. Now he was alone; he would be gone from the farm and from her tomorrow, and he would stay away. Would she care! Perhaps some time she would be told the reason. Perhaps the hateful Bartley would find out all about it, and would gloat over it, and dilate upon the story in *Chips*. Perhaps he had heard rumors already. To what else could he have referred in that item Nell had shown Ned in the hallway? He could not know the whole truth yet, however, or he would have made use of it before; he was not the man to suppress such a "juicy morsel," as he called every bit of scandal. What if Ned's wife should come to Midland and claim support? Could he possibly take her back? He answered emphatically "no" as soon as his question was asked. But how could he keep her away without a legal divorce if she should persist in coming to him? He had written as Mr. Brinton had suggested; but would she accept such a decision on his part? What would his friends say when his plight should be exposed, and his years of concealment laid open? What would Mrs. Brinton think? Ned wondered if Brinton had told his wife the whole miserable secret. He had promised not to reveal it. Perhaps he did not count his wife as another person. What would Bessie think if she should know? Doubtless she would blame him for the concealment, and might even feel sorry a little for his sufferings. He hoped she would never know. Well, all this he must be prepared to face in the days to come, with the embittering knowledge of what might have been. But now, tonight, he would enjoy this blessed spot, made sacred by his first real love. It would do no harm

to give himself up for an hour, here, alone, to the memories which rushed upon him. How she had tripped along, like a little brown and red woodland fairy, over the tree trunks and mosses! How her sweet throat, unconfined by a stiff, senseless collar, had swelled and trembled with her happy singing and her merry laughter! What deep, sympathetic, understanding eyes she had, and how they had looked straight at him, large, frank, fearless, and unashamed! What sparkles of fun burst from them when she laughed! With what unconscious grace she tossed back her head when the heavy strands of soft brown hair fell across her face as she stooped to gather flowers! She had stepped out on the dam, and dared him to follow her. He could see her tiny foot and rounded ankle creeping from under her loose skirt to feel the treacherous way along the log. She had almost fallen into the water and had called to him. Her warm fingers had clasped his—Ned sprang to his feet. The rush of his feelings was too strong to bear in so silent a posture. He stood out in the moonlight and stretched his arms, with tense muscles and clenched fists. A rustle and a cracking twig sounded behind him, and he swung around to see a small cloaked figure emerge from the woods into the clearing.

"Bessie!"

"Mr. Jewell! you here!" Even the most deliberate purpose could not prevent the instinctive bit of feminine pretense contained in that startled little cry of surprise.

"For heaven's sake! What brings you here this time of night?" exclaimed Ned, utterly confused and overcome.

"I—they wanted me to sing—I couldn't—I ran away—and—came here." A sudden fear swept over her that he would think she had followed him. "I often come here alone," she added.

"But why tonight?" he urged.

"Why not tonight? It's so beautiful and clear—almost as light as day. This is my favorite place to be alone. If you were not here I'd be alone now," which superflous remark bore more significance to Ned than was intended.

"I'll go, at once," he said.

"No, no, not yet; you're going away tomorrow. Why?" It was hard to say which spoke most loudly, the accusing angel or the pleading woman.

"I must; I'm too far away from the office."

"Oh, pshaw! that's no reason. I've heard Mr. Brinton say over and over again that the farm is near enough to the office."

"Mr. Brinton is the proprietor; I am his foreman. He doesn't need to be there as early as I do."

"Did he ever find fault with you for being late?"

"No, of course not, since he asked me to come out here."

"Well, then, he doesn't want you to go back to the village on that account."

"Mr. Brinton approves of my going."

"Because he wants you to keep longer hours at the office? Is that the reason?"

Ned was becoming disconcerted by her persistence on a definite point. Evasions did not satisfy her.

"Mr. Brinton has never asked me to keep longer hours. I know the situation myself. I do as I think right without waiting for him to ask it."

Bessie was convinced that this was only dodging; she would not abandon the point.

"Mr. Jewel, tell me the truth; is that the only reason you want to leave Oakdale?"

What an inquisitor! She was as direct and persistent as Mr. Brinton, himself, thought Ned. What if she should worm his secret from him, as his employer did?

Such a calamity must not be thought of for an instant.

"I can't give you any other reason, Miss Bessie," he said, and then, as if to add plausibility to his excuse, he added, "You know the roads will be bad in the winter —maybe impassable for days at a time with snow drifts, if we should have a blizzard. Mr. Brinton might be badly delayed in getting to the office, or even prevented altogether. It would be very necessary for me to be on the spot to look after things in his absence."

"Nonsense! It's three months at least before such a thing could happen; besides Mr. Brinton has good horses and sleighs. Mr. Jewel, I believe you're making that all up for an excuse."

"Thank you, Miss Bessie," he said, trying to be sarcastic for want of any better defense.

"Why don't you tell me the real reason, Mr. Jewel? It seems strange for you to go away all of a sudden like this just when the most beautiful time of the year is coming on—that is, it's the most beautiful after the summer is gone and before the winter comes on," she added, remembering her previous declaration that she liked every month best while it lasted. "The woods will be glorious, and the winter apples are just getting ready to pick, and the nuts will be here soon. You'd like it ever so much better here than in the village."

"Yes, no doubt; but we can't always have the things we would like best."

"Not when we don't make any effort to get them," said the wood sprite, boldly, and then waited in the moonlight, with beating heart—but nothing happened.

"How can you bear to go back to that stuffy boarding house? You said it was like escaping from a coffin to get away from there."

"I'm trying not to compare the relative comforts of Mrs. Plimpton's and Oakdale" said Jewel grimly. Why

did the girl persist in making his duty so much harder than necessary? He had no idea that she was bent on making it impossible because she did not believe it was his duty.

There was no doubt in Bessie's mind as to the reason for his going. She did not question the correctness of her own diagnosis of his case. Had not both he and she more than once divined each other's thoughts before they were spoken, in the days when they rambled together through fields and woods with their "foster mother" Nature? Were not their hearts always in sympathy? How could she be mistaken now? She was surprised that he seemed so slow to understand. She even experienced a sense of disappointment that now in the most important thing of all he should be less discerning than she. She could not account for this shortcoming where she had expected immediate comprehension on his part. Evidently he was jealous of Caleb. The idea! How could he, who knew her tastes so well, imagine that she could prefer that man? He ought to have known in the first place that she was only trying to be polite to the good-hearted fellow. This ought not to have caused Ned to grow so jealous and snub her so cruelly. She had thought to punish him by letting Caleb help feed her pets, and by promising to go riding with him. That ought to have brought Ned to his senses, because he must have known that such a ride alone with Caleb would be distasteful to her. Instead, he was going to the extreme of leaving Oakdale, and her! How could he be so blind? Of course, if he didn't know her so well, if he didn't understand her feelings and tastes so intimately, there might be some reason for his mistake. Another man might be justified in feeling jealous, but he ought to know better. Still, here he was apparently deep in his misunderstanding, and about to make the worse mistake of going away and leaving her

to the mercies of that dreadful Caleb, who had promised to "try again" after "giving her time." It was possible he really didn't know. No doubt he ought to be punished, but it would be wrong to let him ruin his life, and hers, to gratify her pique. His eyes must be opened before it should be too late. So poor little Bessie had reasoned, guided only by her woman's intuition and her woman's heart. It was because of this reasoning that she had come out into the woods at night to rescue the man from the consequences of his mistake. She looked at him, standing in the edge of the moonlight, and wondered how far she must go to rouse him to his senses. She thought she had really gone far enough. Why couldn't he take a step for himself?

"It isn't too late to change your mind; you don't have to go tomorrow. I think you might—Mr. and Mrs. Brinton would be glad to have you stay, I'm sure." She allowed a little coaxing tone to steal into her voice. Surely he didn't want her to ask him as a personal favor to stay.

"I'm sorry, Miss Bessie—I should love to stay—if it were right; but I can't—I can't." The unnatural hoarseness, the evident distress in his voice frightened her. It was clear that he had taken her kindness to Caleb more deeply to heart than she supposed. What if he imagined she really cared for the boy?

"But, Mr. Jewel, you must be mistaken—you are too sensitive," she insisted. "It would be perfectly right to stay when Mr. Brinton—and everybody wants you to—and you want to."

"Mr. Brinton does not want me to." The reply was forced from him in very desperation.

"Oh, you don't mean that! I know he does. Only the other day I heard him saying what fun it would be here in the winter, and how he wouldn't mind the cold ride to and from the office with you to keep him company."

No answer, only a quick gasp of pain, came from the man, who drew back into the shadow as though to hide his distress from her. She waited for him to speak, and as she did so a trembling came upon her. For pity's sake, what was the man waiting for?

"Mr. Jewel, I don't understand you. How can you behave so indifferently to your friends? We all want you to stay. Mrs. Brinton does—I do."

Ned seemed to cringe before her. "Don't! Miss Bessie. I must go. I ought to have gone before. It's hard enough as it is; don't make it harder. Caleb—"

"Wait a minute, Mr. Jewel!" cried the girl, "I want to tell you something. Mr. Trimmer proposed to me this afternoon—asked me to marry him. I—I refused."

Ned sprang forward a step, then recoiled farther into the shadow. He was trembling violently with the effort to control himself. When he spoke he could scarcely force the words from his mouth. "Did—you? Why? He is a true—oh, why did you tell me this?"

"Why?" replied the girl, almost beside herself with perplexity and disappointment at Ned's strange behavior. "Why? Because I thought you'd like to know. But you don't care—you draw back from me—you'd rather I should marry him. I know now why you're going away. It's because you don't like me, and don't care for my—my happiness! I—I—thought—" but what she thought was lost in a flood of tears, as, overcome with humiliation she sank to the ground and buried her face in her arms on the log, weeping in a perfect abandonment of distress.

In an instant Ned Jewel was kneeling beside her on the moonlit ground. "My God, Bessie! Don't—don't cry like that! I love you! Oh, I love you, Bessie!" but there was no joy in his words. They burst from him like great, passionate sobs. He put his arms around her shoulders and tried to lift her up. She

"She raised her pretty head and looked full into his face with the sweet confession still warm on her lips."

raised her head and looked at him. In the bright moonlight she could see his face plainly. It was dreadful. She thought love was something to make a man happy when he told it to the girl who wanted to hear it. If he loved her, why didn't he call her "darling"—why didn't he kiss her?

"I don't believe you do," she said, after waiting awhile. "All along I thought you did. If I hadn't, I never would have said what I did just now; but I was mistaken. You wouldn't go away like this and leave me to —to Caleb Trimmer. You wouldn't look so—so ghastly when you say you love me." Her sentences were mingled with the sobs which continued unrestrained.

Ned seated himself on the tree trunk and drew her up beside him. The case now was worse than he had ever imagined it could be; but further disaster must be avoided at all costs. He knew it was a hopeless task now to try to satisfy her with explanations which did not explain, but he continued, desperately:

"I do love you, Bessie. I loved you the first day we came here together. I've loved you more and more every day since then; but it's all hopeless and in vain. I knew it was so in the beginning, and I ought to have gone away then. I tried to, but not in the right way, and Mr. Brinton wouldn't let me go. Now, when I've waited too long, like a coward, and made you care, I must go. I can't help it—even if it kills me, I must go."

"But why? Tell me why—Ned. Surely I have a right to know. You ought not to leave me if you love me, and I—I—love you." Her pretty head drooped a minute, then suddenly she raised it and looked full into his face with the sweet confession still warm on her lips. Why should she be ashamed now? But what in mercy's name was the matter with him? He actually shrank back as though he had been struck with a blow! What girl was ever before so treated?

"Don't! For God's sake, Bessie, I can't stand it! It's just because of that love, that I must go. It can mean nothing but torture to both of us. I have no right to offer you mine, nor to take yours. I—I am a married man!"

It was the girl who shrank away now—shrank away with a startled cry, and crouched down in her cloak. Indeed, she seemed to wither like a delicate cut flower in the dry, hot rays of the sun. The cruel secret had been torn from Ned in spite of all his efforts to hold it back.

It was true, as she had said, she had a right to know—a more compelling right than Mr. Brinton. To deny that right would have been worse than cowardly—it would have been dastardly. It is doubtful if ever, through all the past months, when, alone, he had faced his trouble, or even when Mr. Brinton had forced a confession from him, such a complete realization of his position had come to him as when he saw this crushed and heart-stricken girl shrink away from him in horror after avowing her love. Now she would despise him—she would hasten his going more vehemently than she had urged him to stay. Well, it was part of the penalty he had brought upon himself.

A small voice came from under the hood of the cloak after a long interval.

"Where is your wife?"

"I don't know; she ran away nearly five years ago; I haven't seen her since. I thought she might be dead; but she isn't. I've had two letters from her within the past month. The last was from Bay City."

Another long pause; then— "Do you love your wife? Does she love you? Does she want to come back? Do you want her to?"

"No, to all of the questions," was Ned's brief answer.

There were signs of some reviving animation in the

cloak, and presently the inevitable request, "Tell me all about it, please."

So the whole story, as he had told it to Brinton, was repeated, but with less detail as to the demands for money. Bessie listened silently until he stopped speaking. Then she looked up with something of the old trustfulness. Her face was wet with tears.

"I'm sorry—Mr. Jewel," she said.

"And will you forgive me, Bessie?"

"I—don't think—there's so very much to forgive."

"Well, then you'll try to forget, and be happy again? If you don't, I can never forgive myself."

"I—must go back to the house. Good-by, Mr. Jewel," she held out her hand sadly. "I can't promise—the impossible," she said.

CHAPTER XXIX

October had come again and found Sam Hawkins busy with a very different enterprise from that of a year ago. The new salt works were just being established, with great promise of future prosperity. Every day Sam called at *The Pioneer* office for consultation with Brinton, but very little of their plans or hopes found expression in public. The contrast with this quiet method of handling the business and the noisy exploitation of Bartley's speculative concern was so marked that people spoke of the Hawkins Salt Company as the least talked about enterprise ever launched in Midland County. Its importance and financial possibilities assumed greater proportions in the local estimate because of this very reserve on the part of the owners.

Ned Jewel, of course, as the personal friend of both Brinton and Hawkins, was acquainted with all the facts and kept in touch with the progress of the work. Brinton was glad to have the young man interest himself in anything which would take his mind off of personal troubles. Ned had been back at Mrs. Plimpton's boarding house for several days. He had tried to keep the fact of his return as quiet as possible so as to avoid questions and evasions. The crew of *The Pioneer* were given to understand that he had been spending the summer in the country with Mr. Brinton, and that his coming back to the village in the Fall was a matter of course.

One day, about a week after his farewell to Oakdale, he was in the editor's private office when Sam came for his usual afternoon conference. Brinton had been at

home the day before, and was too busy with his writing to give Sam much time.

"Why don't you take Ned out and show him the works?" he suggested. "I shan't need him this afternoon, and he hasn't been out there yet. Come in again tomorrow; I'll have more time."

This plan suited both the young men, and they walked together to the place on the south side of the town where the salt wells were situated, between the F. & P. M. Railroad and the Tittabawassee River. The drills had been withdrawn, the casing and piping put in, and the limpid brine was flowing through the series of lime vats into a large solar vat where the evaporation and crystallization took place."

"We'll have a steam evaporating plant in a few weeks," explained Sam. "It will do the work much more quickly, besides being ever so much cleaner and taking up less space. We began with this outfit to save investing too much money until we proved the capacity of the well. There's no uncertainty on that score, now, and the steam outfit has been ordered. It's going to be right up to date and one of the best in the state."

"You're certainly in luck," said Jewel. "It's giving Bartley the nightmare, though."

"Probably his conscience troubles him."

"Oh, yes, no doubt; like the green goods man I read of who stole the satchel that he thought contained the country man's thousand dollars and found that by mistake he had taken another one containing only paper. When he saw the farmer, afterwards, making off with the real money, his conscience troubled him."

"This isn't the only well we'll have," Sam declared, ignoring Ned's sarcasm. "As soon as I saw what a flow came from this one I ordered another sunk a little to the west—right there, where you see the derrick and drilling machinery."

"H'm, if I had the money, I'd apply for an interest; this doesn't look like a 'bubble fountain,' as Manny calls Bartley's mineral spring." There was just a little touch of envy in Ned's tone. "Just look at that salt leaking out of the vats. Isn't there any way to prevent so much waste?"

"Yes, that won't last long. The cracks will soon be filled up with crystallized salt and that will keep the brine in. Besides, this crude salt you see hanging to the vats and crystallizing on the ground will be shipped out west for agricultural use. There's a much more serious waste than that to be looked after, as soon as we can make the necessary arrangements."

"What's that?"

Sam led the way to the edge of the solar evaporating vat, and pointed to the salt crystals already forming at the bottom of the clear liquid.

"You see the salt gathering? After awhile we'll shovel all those crystals out onto this planking to drain, and then ship it in barrels to the refinery at Saginaw. A lot of this liquid will be left in the vat, and we'll have to let it run off to waste, because we have no way yet to save it; but it's one of the most valuable products of the well."

"Is that so? What can you do with it?"

"Make bromine," replied Sam impressively. "This residue after the salt has been scooped out is called bittern. They reduce it in some way and turn it into a valuable drug. Mr. Brinton has been corresponding with a chemical house in the South, people he knows, and they are going to start a bromine plant here and take all of our bittern."

"Well, you *have* got a good thing," exclaimed Ned; then in a moment he added, "and I'm mighty glad of it, too."

"Thanks," said Hawkins, and Ned did not think it

necessary to explain that much of his pleasure in his friend's success came from the fact that it was a bitter morsel on the tongue of William Harrington Bartley. He had never repeated his suggestion that Sam join in a movement to rid the town of *Chips* and its editor; but this evening as they walked home together he remembered the hint Sam had let fall at the time of their former conversation to the effect that he must settle a personal score with Bartley. He could not resist the inclination to remind him of the remark and to ask him if the score had been wiped out. Sam looked surprised at receiving a reminder of his long deferred debt from such a source, and he tried to think just what he had said to Jewel. Did Ned know the nature of his account with Bartley? He thought it unlikely, and replied simply, "No, to tell the truth, it hasn't been wiped out yet."

Sam Hawkins's new home in the village was on Ashman Street, but a short way beyond Ned's boarding house. As they turned the corner of Benson Street, Ned exclaimed in disgust, "There's that man hanging around here again. Twice already this week I've seen him walking slowly past this way as I came from the office. He never used to go through this street. I'd like to know what he's after."

The editor of *Chips* was sauntering leisurely along just ahead of them, apparently bent on no particular errand. Sam and Ned slowed up to allow him to keep ahead, but in front of Mrs. Plimpton's gate Bartley stopped, casually, and stooped to tie his shoe lace. As he did so he caught sight of the two young men, but did not change his position. There was no way to avoid him but to stop entirely, and they were so close that this would hardly improve the situation. As Bartley noticed their hesitation, he arose and stood away from the gate, saying with mock politeness:

"Pardon me! am I in your way? Want to go in?"

"Thank you," said Hawkins civilly.

"Come back to Mrs. Plimpton's have you, Jewel?" went on Bartley, paying no attention to Sam. "I'd heard so, but wasn't sure. I spose Brinton's pretty little housekeeper gave you the mitten—did she?"

"Good-night, Sam; I must go in; guess supper's waiting," said Jewel, hastily, trying to ignore Bartley's insolence, and moving to enter the gate; but the editor of *Chips* managed to get in his way.

"Excuse me; I asked you a question; perhaps you didn't hear?" he persisted.

Ned was fast losing his temper. He turned upon Bartley for an instant and said shortly, "I didn't wish to hear, and you'd better not repeat it."

"No? Don't you think a newspaper man ought to try to get his facts straight from first hand before printing his news? I understand you left Brinton's farm because you tried to make love to his pretty servant and he wouldn't let you, or she wouldn't have you. Which was it?"

"What you understand," replied Ned angrily, "is evidently made up by your own malicious imagination. I don't care a rap what you understand; but if you take it into your head to print any of your lies, there'll be trouble of a kind you won't find it easy to escape."

"Exactly; I've heard that kind of talk many a time from people who were ashamed to be seen in the light of publicity. If I could be bluffed so easily, I'd have precious little news to print. Perhaps you are afraid your little affair out at the farm might cause inquiry to be made into certain other affairs that you would rather keep dark. I am tempted to broaden the scope of my interview."

"Look here, Bill Bartley," cried Ned, throwing off all

self-control, "you're so fond of inquiry, suppose you take a dose of it yourself. Are you a crack Post Office robber, or simply a sneak thief? How did a letter to Mr. Hawkins, which he never received, get into your office the day after the Post Office was robbed, and what became of that letter?"

Ned's voice shook with excitement as he asked his questions and saw Bartley pale under them. For a moment the editor did not speak, and Ned went on, "If you won't answer me, perhaps there are men you will answer, and they are likely to ask more questions. Sam, you've got far more of a score to settle than you know. It's a fact that a letter you were expecting last Fall, but never received, was seen in Bartley's office the morning after the Post Office robbery. You can get further details at your convenience."

"It's a lie!" exclaimed Bartley. "You can't prove any such thing. If any letter was there, someone else had it; I know nothing about it."

"Never mind," said Sam quietly, "although it's strange that nobody told me about it long ago. I thought a letter had gone astray about that time; but it all happened for the best, so far as I'm concerned. If I had received that letter I might have made a poor investment in real estate."

"Oh, is that so?" snarled Bartley. "You think I stole your letter and got stuck myself, do you? Well, you're dead wrong, you dirty, cowardly little sneaking hypocrite. Why don't you stand up like a man and say what you mean? You're afraid. Here, take this, and run home and say your prayers," with which, Bartley stepped up to Sam and gave him a stinging slap in the face. Then something happened. Sam did not realize that he was angry until his fist had shot out with all the force of his body behind it, and the Editor of *Chips* fell sprawling on his back in the street.

"Good for you, Sam?" cried Ned. "By George! that's just what he needed. If you hadn't done it so quick I'd have taken the job myself."

Sam Hawkins stood motionless, leaning slightly forward, his fists still clenched. An expression of astonishment blended with the rage in his face; but there was more there. A look of exhilaration—almost delight gleamed from his eyes as he watched his adversary slowly gather himself together and rise to his feet. The blow had been a hard one, and it had landed on one of Bartley's eyes. He seemed stunned and utterly perplexed. Sam took a step forward, and raised his fist as though for another blow, the fever of fight still hot in his veins; but, contrary to habit, after receiving a first blow, the redoubtable little editor seemed to have lost his passion for battle instead of having it increased. He looked doubtfully at his two antagonists for a moment, and Ned thought he was measuring his chances, so he spoke up quickly:

"Don't be afraid; there's no case of two against one here. I guess Sam's well able to go it alone. I'll wait till another time."

"Humph! I wouldn't care if there were a dozen of you if I wanted to fight. Just now I don't," and to the surprise and relief, or disappointment, of the two friends, Bartley took himself off muttering something to himself which neither of them could understand.

"Well, I never knew that fellow to be so completely knocked out before," Ned exclaimed, looking after the retreating figure. "He evidently wasn't looking for such a dose. Great Cæsar! but you hit clean and quick."

Sam gave vent to a chuckle, involuntarily, then stifled it quickly. There was a suggestion of trouble, rather than pleasure, in his voice as he replied: "Don't say any more about it, please; that wasn't the way I wanted

to settle with Bartley. Now I'm afraid I've lost him entirely."

"Well, I'm sure I don't know what kind of reckoning you have in store for him," declared Ned, "but whatever it is, I should think this would make a pretty good beginning."

"It's more liable to spoil it all," answered Sam.

The next Sunday, when Robert Allen came for his farewell dinner with Sam and his wife Lettie, the young man repeated his gloomy prophecy, after telling the minister all the details of the affair. A strong, human emotion blazed for a moment in the lumber-jack preacher's eyes, but he did not give it words. Instead, he said, quietly:

"Don't give up, Sam. You can't tell what effect it may have on Bartley. But remember this: If you are full of the will and wish to do the work you have undertaken, and if you continually seek God's strength and guidance, even your mistakes may be made to work together in some mysterious way to hasten the success of your efforts. Nothing will hold you back like hate; nothing will impel you onward like love."

"Yes, but you can't imagine what solid satisfaction it was, just for a minute, to see him on his back and to know that I had put him there with a good square blow with my fist. I guess he won't be quite so ready to insult me on the street again."

If Sam could have heard Bartley's own comments, as he walked away, with one eye rapidly closing, he might have found cause for feelings not utterly hopeless.

"Hanged if the fellow hasn't got some spunk after all! He ain't such a fool as I thought. But that—Jewel. I'll finish him before I stop."

CHAPTER XXX

In the excitement of his altercation with Bartley, Ned had not stopped to consider the full significance of the man's insinuations regarding something Ned wished to hide. His own thoughts were full of that thing at all times, and for the moment it did not seem strange to hear it referred to aloud. But when he reviewed the matter alone, he began to ask himself again, as he had already done several times, how much Bartley really knew. It seemed unquestionable that the editor of *Chips* had gotten hold of some fact or rumor concerning Ned's trouble, but the young man believed it must be only a fragment of his story, or perhaps only a hint. Anything more would hardly be allowed to remain so long idle. The man was too fond of publishing scandal to forego such a piece of news concerning one whom he hated. Yet he might learn the truth any day. Ned's wife might carry out her threat and come to Midland to proclaim herself and demand support. No reply had come from her thus far to Ned's last letter in which he refused to send her the money demanded. He was in daily, almost hourly, dread that she might confront him with the answer in person.

Always restless and ill at ease since the exposure of his trouble became so imminent, Ned had fallen into the habit of taking long walks alone in the evening. On one excuse and another he had refused Sam's cordial invitation to spend his spare time at his house, and invitations elsewhere were avoided or declined in the same way. This evening he left his boarding house imme-

diately after supper and started up Ashman Street toward the Westman road. It was already dark. He noticed casually that a woman was passing on the opposite side of the street. As he was about to turn into the Westman road to the north it suddenly occurred to him that he was headed straight for Oakdale. He stopped and turned halfway around, and at the same time he caught sight of the woman again. She had turned and seemed to be coming towards him. All at once the thought flashed into his mind that it must be his wife. He gasped involuntarily and walked around the corner. In a moment he assured himself that the thing was impossible; his imagination was making him nervous. There was nothing to show that the woman was following him. He continued some distance before yielding to an impulse to look around. When he did so, he found fresh cause to be startled. The woman had turned the corner and was undoubtedly coming his way. Indeed, she must have hastened her steps, because she was nearer than before. Perhaps she merely wanted to reach some destination before the night grew darker. Another moment would decide it, if he should stop to let her pass. He glanced hastily around. No house was close enough for voices to be heard. He stood still under a tree by the roadside and watched the woman as she approached. It was already too dark to discern more than her figure, but he was sure she hesitated an instant when he stopped. If so, the hesitation was quickly over, and she came on until close to him. Then he heard an eager whisper.

"Ned!"

His heart seemed to stand still, as the conviction settled upon him that his worst fears were realized.

"What is it? Is is *you?*" he gasped.

"Yes, it's me, Ned—I mean Mr. Jewel. Forgive me for following you. I—I couldn't help it."

Ned, looking closer, recognized the woman with so great a sense of relief that he forgot to be surprised.

"Oh! It's you, Miss Tompkins," he said in a very different voice.

"Yes; didn't you know me? Who did you think it was?" A quick note of suspicion sounded in the question.

"I—didn't know," replied Ned. He was beginning to wonder what could have brought the girl out here at such a time.

"Never mind—I suppose you was thinking of the girl you met this summer, or maybe—no, I won't believe Bart's lies. I won't believe you would—"

"What is it you want, Miss Tompkins? Why did you follow me?"

"I'll tell you; but don't be angry; I never did such a thing before. Please listen to me."

"I'm listening."

"Oh, Mr. Jewel, you're in trouble—some kind of trouble; I know you are. Bart's been telling me things today—he's told me things before about you. I don't know how much of them are lies—or if any of them are true; but I know he wants to harm you."

"Why should he tell you his—lies? What have you got to do with them?"

"He wants to make me—to turn me against you. He says you made love to that girl at Mr. Brinton's house, and that she refused you, and so you came back here. He says you wronged a girl before you came to Midland and then deserted her, and he says—that's what you would have done to Bessie Carroll. I don't believe him."

"The infernal scoundrel!"

"They were lies, weren't they—all of them?" cried the girl eagerly.

"Of course they're lies! Every one of them is a lie—black as the father of lies who invented them!"

"I knew it—I told him so, but he laughed and said I'd soon find out—and I know you have some trouble—I've seen it more than once. Some way or other Bart is bound to do you mischief. He wanted me to help him one time, and I wouldn't. I'm ashamed to say what he asked me to do. Today he was talking about you again, and nothing seemed too bad for him to threaten. Oh, Mr. Jewel, what is it he has against you? What does he know about you? Oh, I wish you'd tell me, and let me help!"

The girl's words fairly poured themselves out in passionate entreaty.

Ned listened to her utterly astonished, more because of her manner than because of her words. For the past year she had been a casual puzzle to him; now she was a throbbing mystery.

"Why do you tell me all this? Why do you want to know my private affairs?" he demanded.

"Because I—I—Oh, Ned, can't you see? What kind of a fellow are you anyway?"

The girl leaned closer until Ned could feel her hot breath on his face. Her hair was loosened, and fell over her shoulders. He could see her bare white throat gleaming in the dusk. There was a reckless abandon and appeal in her whole tone and attitude. A sudden trembling took hold of the man. He saw that she was warm and beautiful. Instinctively, he half raised his arms to take hold of her, but held himself back by a quick effort.

"What do you mean?" he said in a sharp whisper, knowing, but unwilling to believe.

"Oh, stupid!" exclaimed the girl. "Why do you make me tell you that I'm—in love with you? There! that's what I mean! You ought to see for yourself. I suppose you think I'm dreadful running after you like this. I wouldn't have to for any other man—and

I could have plenty of them; but I don't want them—I want you!"

"Don't—Nell! For pity's sake!"

It was the only time he had ever called her by her first name. It came to his lips on the moment's impulse, and hearing it she grew more reckless.

"Why not? Nobody need know. You say all Bart's stories are lies; then what's to hinder me from coming to you? I love you, Ned. You wouldn't see, and I waited till I couldn't wait any longer. It's awful to have to come and tell you myself! I don't care—I couldn't help it. Bart frightened me. What are you holding back for? Take me, Ned!—ah, take me!" And breathing the last words in a broken, throbbing sigh, the poor girl, who had never in her life known self-restraint, threw her arms around his neck and clung, palpitating, to his breast.

For one brief instant the man wavered as he supported her warm, clinging body; but the temptation had no reinforcement in his own desire, and he quickly pressed the girl away from him.

"Stop, Nell! You don't know what you're doing. I can't take you—if I wanted to a thousand times as much—it's impossible."

"Then it *is* true, what Bart said?" moaned the girl.

"No—no! not that! I told you it was a lie?" Ned was distracted. He could not tell her the whole truth, and he did not want to hurt her needlessly by telling her that she had no attractions for him.

"You're a queer kind of a man," she exclaimed. "I know several men who would give anything for the chance you have, but I don't want them. Bart tried to be free with me one time and I slapped his face good and hard. But you are different, and you seemed so lonely, and in trouble. I thought you'd be glad to have a friend."

"So I would, Nell; and you've shown yourself one more than once. I hope you'll always be friendly." Then he added, as the remembrance of a certain letter came to his mind, "If only you were not so bound up with Bartley's affairs—and if that letter—"

"For pity's sake, Mr. Jewel, please don't bring up that letter again! What if you *were* right, and that happened to be a letter to Sam Hawkins? I certainly never stole it, nor had anything to do with stealing it! Why not let that drop?"

"Perhaps you didn't; but if it was Sam's letter, you—tried to deceive me about it."

"I don't want to deceive you; and I didn't have any interest in that letter at all—except—well, I suppose you'll have to know, since you won't give in. I found that letter on the floor in Bartley's office, and I thought it proved, with other things I knew, that he had a hand in robbing the Post Office, so I kept it. When he threatened you, I threatened him with that letter, and made him give up his scheme for hurting you. When he wanted to print that mean item about you, I made him keep it back. I never wanted to deceive you; but that was the only hold I had on Bart that he was afraid of, and I knew if I gave that up, I wouldn't have anything left to protect you with—and all the time you didn't like me—you were thinking horrid things about me. I'm not what you seem to think, and I'm not bound up with Bart's affairs—I hate him—I hate him!" The pitiful flood of confession had burst from her in a tone of reproach, that became almost a wail as she concluded. Ned saw that she was on the verge of tears, and he hastened to comfort her, feeling guilty of having misjudged her.

"Forgive me, Nell; I was wrong, and you've put me under an obligation I can never pay. Never mind the letter, nor what you told me about it. Even if it wasn't

quite right, you were doing as your generous heart prompted. I'm glad you've told me all about it, and I'm glad you don't like Bartley. Now we can be better friends." He stopped for a moment, well knowing he must not leave the matter there, but uncertain what more to say. She seemed loth to go, and at length he continued, "Try to forget the rest of what has happened tonight, Nell. There are several reasons—two in particular—why it is impossible for us to be anything more than friends. Nothing that Bartley has told you is true. I can't tell whether he knows anything of the truth or not. I am in trouble, as you say; and if I should try to be anything more to you than a friend, I would be bringing the worst kind of trouble to you. Perhaps some time you may know; but I hope you will always feel kindly to me, as I'm sure I shall to you, after this. And I hope you'll be able to get free from Bartley and his disgraceful paper before long. Now, good-night."

The girl had been listening quietly, and when he finished she made no attempt at protest or delay. With a simple "good-night—Ned," she turned away and walked slowly back the way she had come.

CHAPTER XXXI

The next day Ned Jewel received a letter bearing the Bay City postmark. It informed him that he must take the consequences of his refusal to send the money needed to establish his wife in an honest, self-supporting business; that she had no wish to embarrass him and would try for awhile to struggle along with the help of the pittance he had promised to send her, but that if she found herself reduced to extremities he must be prepared to take her back. If that time came she would give him sufficient warning to enable him to make other arrangements if he could. In the meantime, it would be out of the question to give him a permanent address, as she would have to go where fortune took her. He could send the money for the first month to Bay City, and it would be forwarded to her if she was gone away. After that she would let him know where to send it. There was no word of regret for past wrong doing, no pretense of love, nor of a desire to do right—nothing but business. But Ned felt a degree of relief that the day of exposure and humiliation was at least postponed.

Despite reason, honor, and pitiless facts, Ned could not banish the image of Oakdale's song-bird from his heart. To him she was not a song-bird; she was an earnest, warm-hearted, loving woman. She was sympathy embodied, and he longed for such sympathy. She was the other half of himself, and having once tasted what completeness was like, he felt sadly insufficient by himself. He tried resolutely to gain the mastery of his

thoughts and hold them to the things that belonged to him. Hard work and more of it was the only narcotic for his pain—the only thong by which his rebellious thought could be held in leash.

A help and a hindrance in this self-discipline was Percy Ravenstock. When the summer work, the harvesting, and the wood-cutting for the winter were over, or so well in hand that extra help was no longer needed at the farm, Mr. Brinton determined to try the experiment of giving the dwarf work in *The Pioneer* office as general assistant, porter, and "devil." Jimmy, the boy, was anxious to learn to set type, and the editor believed in encouraging ambitious youth, so he had given him a frame.

Ned had his hands full with the new compositor and the new devil. The latter, especially, was a cause of anxiety and required to be handled with great diplomacy. The rest of the crew had been cautioned in advance to avoid riling the simple-minded fellow; but constant watchfulness was absolutely necessary. Ned did not dare to leave Percy in the office with the other men, if he himself was not there. These things helped to keep his mind occupied; but Percy had an unfortunate habit of referring to Oakdale at the most unexpected moments. His most frequent topic was something that Miss Bessie had said, or that Miss Bessie had done. Poor Ned was made to suffer all the pangs of martyrdom by these constant reminders. Needless to say Brinton was wholly unaware of this thorn in the flesh of his foreman.

Percy was the more readily reconciled to his new work because of his consequent nearness to his friend and benefactor, Nell Tompkins. He alone of *The Pioneer* crew made free to go into the printing room of *Chips* whenever he found a spare moment. Crawford treated him kindly, and even young Joe Chabington had sense

enough to keep within bounds in joking with the fellow. Once Bartley had sent him off about his business when he caught him talking to Nell, but beyond an ugly scowl, the dwarf ignored the editor. The girl encouraged him to come as often as he could. She enjoyed his doglike devotion, and she felt in the mood to defy Bartley.

This spirit of rebellion had grown rapidly since her meeting with Ned Jewel, and it was aimed against the paper for which she worked as well as against its editor. The conviction forced itself upon her that she could never win respect from decent people as long as she remained in her present company.

One afternoon, the foreman, Jake Crawford, was absent, and a particularly offensive bit of "copy" came to Nell to be set for the next issue. She glanced at it and then took it in to Bartley's office and threw it on his desk.

"You needn't send that kind of stuff to me; I won't set it," she exclaimed indignantly.

"Oh, you don't say! Well, give it to Joe if you're so squeamish."

"Give it to him yourself; I'm not going to touch it again," and she walked out of the office in high dudgeon.

"Humph!" grunted the editor, as he called Denny, the boy, to take the manuscript to young Chabington.

Towards evening Percy came in to remind her that she had promised to walk out with him to see his mother, who was ill. Nell told him to wait for her, as she had something to attend to after hours. Joe Chabington and Denny never lost a moment when the time came to quit. They were away almost before the editor's bell had ceased to vibrate. As soon as they were gone, Nell went straight to Bartley's office and told him that she had decided to throw up her job and quit *Chips* for

good. The editor had just stopped work and was preparing to go home. He gazed at her in amazement.

"What's that? I don't quite see the point of the joke."

"It's no joke at all; I mean it. I'm tired of working for such a paper, and I'm tired of having such a boss. Is that plain?"

"Ah! The words are plain, but their meaning is somewhat obscure. Kindly state your reasons, if you have any."

Bartley grew cool and sarcastic in proportion as Nell became more excited.

"I don't need to give my reasons; I'm free to do as I please. It's enough that you're a crook; and that you're always up to some new mischief; and that your paper is getting worse and worse; and that anybody who works for you is suspected of being as bad as you are. I'm sick of it all."

"You're crazy, Nell. Anybody would think, to hear you talk, that your own little hands had never touched anything but prayer books and knitting needles. You've had your head turned, thinking of that fool, Jewel. What do you suppose he'd say if he knew some of the things about you that I know? By Jove, I think he ought to know."

"Be careful, Bart! You forget that the Post Office people never succeeded in finding out about that robbery last year. What do you suppose they'd say if they knew some of the things about you that I know? I really think they ought to know. The people of this town are pretty well tired of having you and your paper around. It wouldn't take much more to make them put you out of business."

"Oh, drop it, Nell; we've thrashed all that out before. You can't gain anything by hugging that delusion any

longer. I had no hand in the robbery of the Post Office, even though a certain letter did fall into my possession at the time. It's true you might make things uncomfortable for me for awhile, but I'm sure the resulting exposures of your own affairs would be uncomfortable to you. Better stick to your work, and don't bother your head with silly notions."

"I don't like the work; I've got to quit," insisted the girl, but doubt and fear of what her employer might do in revenge were creeping over her again.

"And then what will you do? I suppose you have other work in view to support your mother and yourself?"

Nell made no reply. She felt helpless, after all. Bartley followed up his advantage by adapting a more conciliatory manner.

"Don't be hasty and hurt yourself, Nell. You have a good place here, and pretty much your own way. I need you—compositors are scarce in Midland—and you need something you can depend upon. You owe it to your mother as well as to yourself to hold what you have until you can do better."

"I can get work in other towns."

"No doubt you can, my dear, if you hunt long enough and far enough; but it would go hard with your mother to be moving about, to say nothing of taking her away from all her friends here."

"Well, I won't have anything to do with such copy as that piece you sent out to me this afternoon, and I won't have anything more to do with your schemes, either," she replied, by way of yielding. She told herself, however, that nothing would keep her on *Chips* as soon as an opportunity came for earning her living elsewhere.

Nell came out of the little editorial office just in advance of Bartley. She was sure she saw a short,

misshapen figure dart out of the printing room door into the hall, but when she reached the spot she could not see any sign of life. The editor had not noticed anything amiss. When Nell reached the sidewalk Percy, the giant dwarf, was patiently waiting her appearance.

CHAPTER XXXII

Jesse Brinton proved himself a true friend to his lonesome and troubled young foreman during the weeks and months which followed his exile from the farm. He felt genuinely sorry for him, and tried to divert his mind from brooding over his misfortune. At least once or twice a week he took Ned driving with him through the country behind his best horse, Zeke, going everywhere except in the neighborhood of Oakdale. On almost every such occasion he insisted upon letting Ned drive. It kept his mind better occupied and gave him a keener relish for the trip, two things Brinton had been quick to observe. Another thing he noticed was that Ned showed surprising proficiency in handling a horse and knew how to get out of him all his best work and speed without fretting or tiring him. This counted for so much in Brinton's opinion that as winter approached he made arrangements with Rounds for stabling Zeke in the village, and gave Ned permission to use him whenever he wished. He bought, also, an extra cutter, which he said would "come in handy" and left that with Rounds, giving Ned the same permission concerning its use in the winter unless there should be need for it at the farm. There was an old buckboard in the barn at Oakdale which was never used, but Brinton refused to allow Zeke to be hitched up to such a thing, although Ned had suggested its availability.

"You'll have to hire your own buckboard for the present," he told Ned. "I'm afraid Zeke would feel

insulted if we put him between the shafts of such a relic."

The same week Ned's salary was raised, as the editor facetiously said, to cover the extra expense he had thrust upon him; but when the young man applied to Rounds the following Sunday for a buckboard, the liveryman refused to charge him anything for it, telling him that he would always be welcome to use any one that was standing idle as long as Mr. Brinton boarded his horse there. Ned never knew that this generosity was a part of his employer's arrangement with Rounds, and that the reason given for increase of salary was merely a pretext to cover up the kind-hearted man's plan for helping him to take care of his other financial obligations.

Winter began early. Following a series of severe frosts came two little snow storms near the end of November. The second of these, occurring the night before Thanksgiving and before the first thin skin of snow had disappeared, brought the total up to five or six inches in depth. When the morning of the holiday dawned bright and clear, everybody awoke to the fact that sleighing was possible, at least for a day or two.

Whoever owned a horse and a pair of runners, whether sleigh, cutter, bob, or jumper, was immediately seized with the desire to try the going and to be as near the first on the road as possible. *The Pioneer* office was closed for the day, and Brinton remained at Oakdale. He had declared his intention to drive in to the village in the afternoon if possible, but told Ned not to expect him. The young man was out with Zeke and the new cutter soon after breakfast and found Main Street already a-jingle with bells. He had gone but a short way when he saw Percy Ravenstock standing alone by the roadside watching the sport enviously. It suited

Ned's mood to hail the unfortunate fellow and take him into the cutter for a ride. He felt a sort of comradeship for him.

In the village and the surrounding farms were many speedy horses, whose owners were willing to try conclusions with anyone who would accept a challenge, spoken or unspoken. On this bright, crisp morning, when the holiday spirit was abroad, and the first sleighing of the season was tempting the sportive horseman to display the best points of his animal, many a friendly "brush" occurred between rivals for the honors of the road.

Pete Murray drove into town early with his light filly and single cutter. He always carried the proverbial chip on his shoulder whenever horseflesh was discussed. It was his boast that he kept the best stable in Midland County and that no one knew a horse, from fetlock to mane, better than he. A team of massive percherons did his heavy draught work; another team of well-built Normans was kept exclusively for general farm service, and a pair of finely matched black steppers were reserved for carriage use. These, with his fast filly constituted his stable, and they were the pride of his heart. He had no monopoly of speed, however. There were several men who claimed that they could beat the best he had. Conspicuous among these boasters were Hank Farineau and Caleb Trimmer. The latter always insisted that Rob Roy could run away from anything on four legs; while Farineau declared, as he hitched up his beautiful grey mare, Dolly, for a spin with the elder Chabington that Thanksgiving morning, "There ain't a horse in Midland County that can show us his heels, is there, old girl? Look at those legs, Chab, and that neck; best piece of horseflesh that ever grew in these parts. Her sire was a thoroughbred." The hotel man, having no competitor of his own to defend,

was quite willing to agree as to the merits of the horse behind which he was about to ride.

Farineau had recently come into one of his temporary and mysterious periods of opulence. He had signalized it by indulging himself, among other things, in a brand-new outfit of cutter, harness, bells, and plume, and he was in haste to take the lead in the holiday procession. Main Street was alive from end to end with all kinds of turnouts as he and Chabington flashed into view.

"Well, I'll be—Look at Brinton's foreman driving with that human gorilla! What do you think of that?" exclaimed Farineau, as one of the first things to catch his eye was Ned and Percy with Zeke. The horse was stepping along at a fairly good pace without endeavoring to race with any of the others.

"Steady, Dolly, that's old man Brinton's high-toned four-year-old Zeke. He's overrated; you can run rings around him, girl. Come on, let's take some of the conceit out of him," and Farineau, tightening his hold on the reins, gradually drew up alongside Ned Jewel.

Percy, who was having the time of his life, grunted and began to fidget impatiently, but Ned remained perfectly cool, and appeared not to notice the implied challenge. He was looking ahead and picking his road.

"Go on, Dolly, show 'em the way," laughed Farineau, turning his head slightly toward the other cutter.

"You ain't goin' to let—" began Percy, appealingly.

"Sh!" said Jewel, and then something that only Zeke understood spoke to him along the lines. Farineau's horse ceased to creep up on his flank. Another moment she was at the tail of Ned's cutter, and before the turning point, at the cemetery, was reached she was several lengths behind. As Ned swung easily around in a wide curve, Farineau came up, took an inside turn, and sluing sharply before Ned could prevent the maneuver, was off down the road on the return trip with a sneering

challenge to Jewel to shake up his "crow bait" or he would get lost in the shuffle.

"Will we, Zeke?" asked Ned in a low tone, as he tightened the lines once more and started in hot pursuit of the boaster. Zeke evidently had a different opinion. The space between him and the cutter ahead began immediately to lessen, foot by foot. Down past the county jail they sped, and Farineau could see Zeke's head out of the corner of his eye without turning. At the court house, the horses were neck and neck. Farineau and Chabington were getting excited, while Ned appeared to be paying no attention whatever to the other cutter or its occupants. Pedestrians stopped on the sidewalks to watch the brush. Other rigs began to draw to one side or the other of the road to get out of the way. At the Methodist Church, Jewel was half a length ahead, and Farineau began to ply the whip; but Ned merely gave Zeke a little more head. When Benson Street was reached the "crow bait" was fully two lengths in the lead. Farineau was chagrined and furious. A crowd quickly gathered as they heard his oaths and saw that trouble of some kind was brewing.

"Ned Jewel, you can't do that again for money! That was only a fluke. I can beat you over any distance you please. Come, money talks; put up or shut up." As he spoke he pulled out a roll of bills and shook it excitedly in Ned's face.

A gleam of desire sprang into the young man's eyes. He hesitated a moment. Goodness knew he needed the money, and there wasn't much doubt that he could win any race between Farineau's horse and Zeke. There had been plenty in reserve when the latter had finished, while the grey mare had been driven to the limit. But Ned's struggle was over almost as soon as it began. His voice was perfectly calm as he replied:

"This isn't my horse; it belongs to Mr. Brinton. I

couldn't enter it in a regular race without his permission. Besides, I haven't any—I don't care to bet any money." What was the use of telling Farineau that he was practically penniless and could not bet even if he wanted to?

"You're afraid! You know you couldn't win in a fair race; that's what's the matter with you," sneered the other, still shaking his money tantalizingly at Jewel.

"Nonsense! Why should I be afraid? I just beat you twice, although you went to the whip, and Zeke was under a pull and had plenty left. You know it as well as I do, and so does everyone who saw the brush. Talking loud isn't going to fool anybody."

"Ah, shut up! You're a coward. Here's the stuff that talks. If I'm willing to put good money on Dolly to beat that horse, there can't anybody say I'm licked when they see you back out." The fellow was so angry that he seemed on the point of striking Ned, and the crowd drew closer around them.

"If Mr. Brinton will let me, I'll race you with Zeke any time and anywhere you like. You're beaten now, but you'll be beaten a good deal worse if I let Zeke out. He belongs to Mr. Brinton, and it's for him to say whether he wants him raced or not. But race or no race, I won't bet with you, so that part of it is settled."

"Ef he won't, then I will, by jimminy!" cried Caleb Trimmer, pushing his way through to the center of the crowd. "My Rob Roy kin make thet grey mare o' yourn look like a plow horse. How much d'ye want to put up?"

"Oh, you—don't bother me! Have you got a thousand dollars to back your big talk?"

"No, I hain't got a thousand dollars; no more hev you, an' ye can't bluff me off like thet. I'll bet ye a whole month's wages, ef ye really want to bet."

"Don't you worry, boy, I want to bet all right, but

I want to settle with Jewel first. If he's a coward and is going to flunk, I'll back my mare to beat any horse that can be trotted out in the village of Midland City, yours, or anybody else's." Farineau's voice was raised almost to a shout of general defiance.

"Begorry, thin, that manes me," broke in Pete Murray from his cutter on the outskirts of the crowd. "It's a foine job ye'll have on yer hands to bate this filly, or one of my blacks. If it's a cool thousand ye want, Misther Blowhard, I think I know where to put me hands on the sum."

"Jest hold on there; I got the first call," cried Caleb. "I'm going to bet Hank forty dollars Rob Roy kin beat his mare, an' he's the one's got to put up or shut up. Ye can't expect Jewel to go makin' a race with a horse thet ain't his."

"Humph! forty dollars! I don't bother with such little stakes. Might as well make it forty cents." Farineau turned again to Ned.

"Once for all, Jewel, are you going to take me up, or are you scared?"

"You know whether I'm scared or not. I've told you what I'll do. Mr. Brinton may be down this afternoon. If he is I'll see what he says about racing Zeke. I'm ready and willing any time on the terms I said. If you make up your mind to risk a worse beating let me know," and clearing the crowd from in front of his cutter, he started off up the street, leaving the others to contend with Farineau, whom he regarded as nothing but a braggart. When the latter tried to follow him, he was intercepted by Caleb, and the crowd closed in again.

"Ye can't sneak out thet way," he cried. "After all your shoutin' ye've got to make good. I'll bet you forty dollars I kin beat ye from the Tittabawassee bridge to the halfway house out on the Pine an' back.

Thet's twelve miles. Run it now, or in a week, or a month; it don't make no difference to me."

"Put up something worth racing for and I'll take it up, but forty dollars for a twelve mile race——bah!"

"Ye're a coward then, an' a quitter," yelled Caleb. "Ye know ye can't beat Rob Roy, an' ye're afeerd to try. I call the hull crowd to witness thet ye're a bluffer an' no good."

Several voices called out in response, "That's right, Caleb; give it to the bluffer. He's afraid."

Farineau scowled and bit his lips. He was known as a betting man, and if he refused Caleb's challenge, he would be subjected to the scorn and ridicule of the village, especially since he had been the first to offer to bet.

"Oh, if you are bound to throw your money away, I may as well take it as anybody," he said. "I was looking for bigger game, that's all."

"An' ye'll not be disappointed," cried Pete Murray, jumping out of his cutter and pushing up close to Farineau. "I'll tack on sixty to Caleb's forty that he'll bate ye. That makes it a clean hundred agin a hundred o' your money."

"That suits me better," declared Farineau.

"Hold on; that ain't all," went on the big Irishman. "After ye git through with the lad, I'll race ye meself the first good day after a month later over the same course or any other ye like, an' I'll put up five hundred dollars, even, that I'll bate ye. The hull six hundred has got to be put up now for the two races."

A shout went up from the crowd as Pete made his proposition. In an instant all eyes were turned to Farineau to see whether he would make good his bluff. He was plainly staggered. It was easy enough to offer to bet thousands with men who he knew hadn't any such amount, but when it came to actually covering a

genuine bet of half a thousand, he caught his breath. Yet he wanted to be considered as big a man as any there, and he didn't dare back down. He cast over rapidly in his mind the amount of his ready cash. He had just about enough to cover the two bets. If he won, he would have a nice little fistful. If he lost—well, there were other risks he could run to replenish his treasury.

"I'll go you on that," he exclaimed, in as offhand a manner as he could assume. "Who'll hold the stakes?"

"Let Mr. Stern hold the five hundred dollar bet, an' anybody ye choose the other one."

"Chabington, here, can hold them both, so far's I'm concerned," said Farineau.

"Why not let Mr. Stern hold 'em both?" asked Caleb, who had anything but agreeable memories of his experience with the manager of the Sanitarium Hotel.

"Better let 'em go separate, lad," said Pete, and it was finally agreed that the two stakeholders should be as suggested, and the money was all to be turned over to them before evening.

"How about Ned Jewel? Does this leave him out altogether?" asked one of the bystanders.

"Let him come on, too, if he likes, an' race with Hank an' Caleb. I may go over the course, meself," suggested Pete.

"I'm satisfied," agreed Farineau, "I'll beat as many as like to go—him especially. I only hope he'll go."

Jesse Brinton drove into Midland after dinner. Ned was on the lookout for him and at once asked permission to race with Zeke. After hearing the particulars, Brinton willingly gave his consent provided a shorter course should be agreed upon, and on condition that Ned adhere to his decision not to bet.

"Twelve miles is a long distance to send a horse in a

race run as that one probably will be," he said. "If all the contestants were like you, and Caleb, and Murray, I would say go ahead; but I know Farineau too well. He thinks he cares for his horse, but when the fever of the race is on him, he wouldn't hesitate to kill his horse to win. He'd force the poor beast until she dropped dead, if necessary, and you would have to adopt his tactics, or let him win. Twelve miles of such racing is too much for any horse."

"They all seem to be agreed upon the course. I suppose in the excitement of the thing, they never thought of that side of the question."

"They will, before the race comes off; at least Murray will. He isn't going to race his filly twelve miles without stopping, for any money."

"I shouldn't wonder if he takes one of the black team. They're older and can stand the strain better."

"H'm—why not arrange for a stop of a quarter of an hour or more at the half-way house to give the horse a chance to breathe and rest? You could have a timekeeper there to see that all took exactly the same time, so that it needn't be considered at the finish."

"If they'll agree to that, can Zeke go?"

"Yes, I'll chance it on that condition—provided, of course, you agree to mine," said Brinton with a laugh.

Ned at once hunted up Caleb, and together they found Farineau. Pete Murray had gone home. When Jewel explained the condition to Caleb, the young liveryman was emphatic in his approval. Farineau was inclined to sneer and object, but he was really anxious to try his mare again with Zeke, and finding that Brinton's condition was the only one upon which Ned could join the race, he finally consented to a quarter of an hour rest at the half-way house, the time to be taken by a committee of three, one man selected by each of the parties

to the race. Christmas Day, or the first good day thereafter, was settled upon for the event.

Farineau had the advantage of more leisure in which to train his horse, while Caleb and Ned had little spare time during the following month. Ned felt reasonably sure of Zeke. He remembered the strong pull on the lines which he had noticed at the end of the brush with Farineau when the latter was whipping his mare to get more out of her. Nevertheless, he went over the course several times, each time faster than before, to make his horse perfectly acquainted with all the turns in the road and all the aspects of the ground. Caleb did likewise. It was a serious business with him. His own reputation as a driver, and that of his beloved Rob Roy were at stake. A whole month's wages—and he worked hard for his money—was at risk, to say nothing of the larger amount which Pete Murray—how Caleb loved him for it!—had staked on his success. Besides all that, if he should win such a big race it would surely make him solid with the girls. Perhaps Bessie might—if not, at least Susie Anderson.

The course was a winding one, nowhere perfectly straight for more than a few rods together. It had never been laid out as a regular State or County road. Skillful driving would be necessary, especially when two cutters should come abreast. Starting from the upper bridge over the Tittabawassee near the tannery, the road ran southward through a hardwood grove for about a mile, then along the banks of the Chippewa river for another mile, after which it passed through an uninviting pine ridge, denuded of its once stately trees and now grown up with briers and covered with fallen and decaying timbers. About four miles from the starting point was a sharp bend in the river, the road following its westerly bank some twenty feet above the water. The roadway here, from the river

edge to a worm fence on the westerly side, was a hundred feet or more wide, and sloped gradually all the way from the fence to the precipitous river bank. From this point to the half-way house the road again bent away from the river and twisted its course among several fairly good farms. The half-way house was situated on a rise of ground at a broadened spot in the road. A piazza extended across the front of the white-washed old building. Nearer the road was a well with the "old oaken bucket" and a tin dipper always convenient for the weary and thirsty passer-by. A large trough, dug out of a pine log, rested below the well spout to supply the needs of thirsty horses. At the south of the hostelry, an ample shed, conspicuous in its coat of whitewash, furnished accommodation for a half dozen or more rigs. The timekeepers who were to watch the fifteen minutes' stop and get the racers off exactly on time would be stationed here, and each contestant could use his time in rubbing down his horse if he chose. The return was over the same road as the outward run.

Christmas was an ideal day for the race, and the road was in perfect condition. Throngs from all parts of the county had gathered to witness the event. Joel Bailey could not be content to remain out of anything in which his friend Pete Murray was a participant. But Joel was strong on draught horses. He could not boast of anything remarkable for speed. He had a team of pretty fair work horses of medium weight which had never been known to run much, but Joel, "jest fer the fun o' the thing," and, as he told Pete confidentially, "partly to make that devil Hank, who got Red off when we caught 'im stealin' Sam's logs, feel cheap, racin' with a plow horse," he entered the race and offered to bet Hank "twenty cents an' a chaw o' tobacco" that he would beat him. Greatly to his indignation, his

offer was spurned, and he told Pete he "needn't keep it secret no longer" why he had entered the lists.

Both at the starting point and at the half-way house were crowds of enthusiasts, gathered to shout for one or another of the racers. Farineau had few supporters, the report of his brush with Jewel on Thanksgiving Day having hurt him greatly. On the other hand, Ned's stock was high. The crowd were uncertain which to back as between him and Pete Murray whose reputation as a horseman was everywhere established. Caleb's Rob Roy was something of an unknown factor, but the boy was generally liked and had many supporters in the crowd. It was rumored that Bartley had gone to as many of them as he could find and laid bets on Farineau to beat Caleb regardless of the others. There were some, even, who shouted out encouragement to the "plow horse" and offered extraordinary bets on him to beat the grey mare. Mr. Brinton, with John Carroll and Dave, had come in to see the event. Ned looked longingly but in vain for another pair of eyes from Oakdale. Just before ten o'clock, the time set for the start, Brinton called Ned aside. The editor was plainly nervous and trying to control his inclination to come openly to the support of his own horse.

"Look here, Ned," he said in a half whisper. "I'm glad you didn't bet; it's wrong and foolish; I don't believe in it—but you're going to win just the same, aren't you, Ned? I should hate to see you and Zeke beaten by that fellow Farineau. I think Zeke is the best of the lot; don't you?"

"I certainly do, and I'm going to win if I can, regardless of bets. I don't think there's much danger that any of them can come in ahead of us."

"That's right, Ned; that's what I think. I'll tell you what I'll do, Ned. If you win, I'll give you fifty dollars."

"Why, Mr. Brinton, thank you! but you don't have to do that. I'll do my best without such an inducement."

"I know it, Ned; but—I'd like to fix it that way. Go ahead now; they're waiting. You needn't mention this to anyone."

The starters were calling the five contestants to their positions which had been chosen by lot. It was impossible for all to start abreast, so stations thirty yards apart had been measured off, the same allowance to be counted at the finish. Farineau drew the first place, Caleb the second, Ned the third, Joel the fourth and Pete the last. The horses were all in fine fettle and seemed to understand what was expected of them.

"Ready!" cried the starter. "One—two—three—Go!" A pistol shot rang out with the last word, and the five horses sprang forward, urged on by the cheers which rose from hundreds of throats.

Joel's "plow horse" sprang upward as well as forward. The pistol shot and the cheers of the crowd frightened him, and he reared and plunged in the effort to escape. Pete was compelled to make a wide detour to avoid him, but a few slow, reassuring words from Joel brought the poor beast to his senses, and he started after the rest with a right good will. Perhaps he thought he was running away. The idea occurred to Joel, and he smiled grimly, giving the horse all the rein he wanted.

The start had been made on the outskirts of the village, where the road broadened just beyond the Titta-bawassee bridge. By the time the first bend in the road was reached, Ned could be seen slowly but surely closing the gap between himself and the two leaders. At the end of the second mile he had passed Caleb and was drawing up on Farineau's flank. With an oath, the latter drew his whip and gave the mare a lash, causing her to leap forward and shake off her pursuer. Then

he drew her more into the middle of the road to prevent Jewel from finding space to pass around him. Ned set his teeth and waited, holding Zeke with a tight rein. He knew such tactics could not be long successful. At the next turn, Farineau unwittingly hugged the inside. Ned saw his chance, and so did Zeke as he felt the lines loosen just a trifle together with a slight pull to the left. Before Farineau realized what was happening, Ned's cutter was abreast, with equal command of the road. Again the lawyer applied the whip. He could not shake off his rival, who was steadily forging ahead. The pine ridge was passed; less than a mile off was the bend of the river. Farineau swore again as he heard Caleb just behind him speak encouragingly to Rob Roy.

"Go it, boy; go it, old feller; we've almost got 'im!"

Rob Roy's nose crept up past Farineau's shoulder. He lifted the butt of his whip to give the horse a blow in the eyes, but it suddenly occurred to him that he might be disqualified for a foul, so he desisted, and brought the lash down upon his own mare instead.

Pete Murray, having been thrown back at the start, was making up for lost ground. His fine black horse seemed for the first time to enter into the spirit of the race as he drew nearer to the others. On and on he rushed, his neck extended like a race horse, and his nostrils spread wide for every breath of wind. Farineau, Caleb, and Pete were bunched for a brief, breathless stretch of straight road, with Jewel running free around the turn ahead. Farineau, by plying the whip, had gained a length on Caleb, while Pete's horse was neck and neck with Rob Roy, but held in a pocket behind the lawyer.

"Go on Caleb! Now's yer chance!" yelled Pete.

"I ain't agoin' to lick Rob Roy, not yet awhile, anyhow!" the young fellow called back. The sight of Farineau swinging his whip spoke volumes to Caleb.

He hadn't touched his own so far. Just then Pete caught a glimpse of open road between the back of Farineau's cutter and Rob Roy's nose.

"Wall, good-bye, Caleb; I'll git out o' your way." With a sharp call to his horse, Pete shot through the opening, overhauled Farineau and went on in the chase after Ned Jewel and Zeke. "The lad 'll soon be takin' the measure o' that shyster," he said to himself, not a shadow of doubt as to the result entering his mind.

Farineau was almost crazy with rage, as he saw the second of his foes pass him and felt the third hanging relentlessly to his heels. If Pete could beat him now, the chances of ever seeing his five hundred dollars again would become painfully small. Already his mare was beginning to show signs of the punishment she had received. For the first time, Farineau began to look forward appreciatively to the resting spell at the half-way house. The river bend was just ahead. He had examined the ground carefully at the turn, and thought that with a little jockeying he might shake off Caleb and overhaul Pete. Then with a spurt on the last outward mile and a half he could reach the half-way house ahead of these two at least. Figuring thus, when he came to the wide space at the bend, he dashed into the unbroken snow close to the river bank to make a short cut across to the beaten road beyond. The coup might have been successful if a stump and a frozen rut had not lain hidden under the mantle of snow. The mare stumbled, the cutter caught in the obstruction, and like a shot from a catapult, Farineau was hurled from his seat and thrown headlong down the embankment.

His horse quickly regained her footing, and relieved from the weight of her driver, and feeling no restraining hold on the lines, made a dash for liberty. In another instant she would have been a hopeless runaway had not Caleb, by his immediate alertness and daring,

urged Rob Roy straight across her path before she could regain the road, or gather much headway. Rob Roy was obedient and docile, but the mare, already badly fretted, and now frightened as well, was at first intractable. Caleb struggled bravely with her, however, and at last subdued her, at the cost of several bruises to himself. The whole affair had occupied, in reality, scarcely an appreciable length of time, although to Caleb it seemed like several minutes. Just as he had both horses under control, Joel Bailey dashed up with his "plow horse."

"Hello! What's up?" he cried, stopping short.

"Don' know, yet; Farineau's thrown down the bank, there, tryin' to make a short cut. Hold on to these horses till I see if he's killed."

"Humph!" was all Joel said, but he got out and held the two horses. His own didn't need holding; he was glad of a rest.

Caleb quickly satisfied himself that Farineau had received no serious injury. He had fallen into a deep drift of snow just below the roadway, and was floundering about in search of a foothold, as Caleb peered over the bank. The latter reached down his hand and helped his rival to gain solid ground, then he hurried back to the cutters, calling to Joel to "make tracks out o' this an' show the ol' nag's heels,' an invitation which Joel was not slow to accept. The two horses were in danger of being badly entangled. Already the left shaft of Farineau's cutter was caught between Rob Roy's right trace and his collar. Caleb backed the mare away to release the shaft.

"Let go of that horse, there!" yelled Farineau hurrying up.

"I'm jest gettin' 'em untangled," said Caleb, in surprise. "Ye wouldn't hev a horse here at all ef I hadn't a-stopped her from runnin' away."

Farineau made no reply, but snatched the bridle of his horse from Caleb and, gathering up the lines, sprang into his cutter to resume the race. In the maneuvering and twisting of the two rigs, the rear brace on the right side of Farineau's cutter had caught around the end of Caleb's runner. The instant Farineau started, the young fellow discovered the entanglement.

"Hold on a second! back up! You'll upset my cutter!" he cried in alarm.

"Go to blazes! What do I care for your cutter?" snarled the lawyer, as he kept on, sluing Caleb's sleigh around until it was fairly across the roadway, and almost upsetting it at the same time.

"Oh, ye mean, cowardly son-of-a-gun! Thet's what I git for helpin' ye!" Caleb shouted after him; but Farineau swung his whip over his horse and paid no heed. By the time Caleb got his cutter into position again and started in pursuit, his heartless rival was out of sight beyond the curve in the road. Poor Caleb was alone, the last in the procession. For almost the first time in his life he was in an ugly mood. Such outrageous treatment from a man whom he had just succored, whose horse he had saved, cut him like a lash from a whip.

"It's a darn shame, Rob Roy! Thet's what it is. Ef we hadn't stopped for thet blame son-of-a-gun, we'd be to the half-way house now. Ye kin beat the hull crowd of 'em, I know ye kin, old boy. Go on now, there's a good feller; go on, an' fetch thet dirty ol' stick-in-the-mud. I wish I'd left 'im stickin' in the snow drift." So the young fellow confided his troubles to his horse, and the faithful animal responded with a burst of speed that sent a thrill of hope into his master's heart.

"Good boy! Thet's the way! We'll ketch 'em yet! I knew ye could do it," he cried aloud, letting the lines out to give Rob Roy his full head.

But he could not overhaul either Joel or Farineau. Too much time had been lost, and although he made up some of the lost ground, the three cutters arrived at the stopping point in the same order in which they left the bend—Joel first, Farineau a minute later, and Caleb thirty-five seconds after Farineau. Ned had arrived a full three minutes before with Pete only a score of lengths behind. The crowd at the half-way house greeted each arrival with a cheer, and gathered around the contestants to hear the news of the race.

"I'll git square with you, Hank Farineau!" Caleb shouted, as soon as he drove under the shed. "I never thought a feller could be so mean, after hevin' his horse saved from runnin' away and maybe gittin' killed, an' smashin' the cutter, an' no tellin' whether ye'd broke your own neck. Ye know right well I'd been here long ago ef it wa'n't for thet."

"Oh, dry up! You whine like a baby. I didn't ask you for your help. The mare wouldn't have run away at all if you'd let her alone."

"Yes, she would; she'd o' smashed yer cutter into bits, an' run away as sure es shootin'. I seen her myself, she was scared out of her senses," declared Joel; but Farineau refused to discuss the matter further, and went on rubbing his horse with a handful of hay twisted up for a brush, while Caleb and Joel were kept busy answering the questions that were fired at them from all sides.

When the time came for Ned and Pete to start back, Farineau became exceedingly restive. He pulled his horse and cutter into position and waited impatiently for the signal. The two leaders were scarcely out of sight when he exclaimed: "It must be time for me now. I came in right behind them."

"No, sir; you came in four minutes after them," said the spokesman for the time keepers. "Anyhow, Joel Bailey has to go a whole minute ahead of you."

"I don't believe it! You're not keeping the time fair. I don't care anything about that old farm horse. I can gallop away from him in the first half mile, even with his minute start, but Pete Murray was never that much ahead."

"That's what he was. All three of us agree on the time, so I guess you'll have to take our say so. Get ready Joel. One—two—three—go!"

"By, by, Hank. Bill an' me must git home an' 'tend to our plowin'," called out Joel, mockingly, as he slapped the lines on his old horse and sped away.

"Come, Caleb, be ready in about a minute," said the timekeeper, as the young man was so busy petting and talking to Rob Roy under the shed that he seemed oblivious to the passage of time.

Farineau gave the signal to his mare and started off.

"Come back here, or you'll be disqualified!" yelled the timekeeper, and a storm of hisses and catcalls burst from the crowd.

"I thought it was time," growled Farineau. "I go before Caleb Trimmer does."

"We'll give you the signal to start. Now—be ready!"

In another instant the word go had been given and Farineau dashed off at full speed to open up as long a gap as possible before Caleb could follow. The young liveryman's heart was beating wildly as he waited alone for the momentous word. It seemed delayed for an age. All sorts of things flashed through his mind in that brief space of thirty-five seconds. The outward trip—every incident of it passed in review. He knew Farineau would make no allowance whatever for what he had already done, and he was determined to beat the fellow on the return no matter what exertion it called for. Everything depended on Rob Roy now. If he understood the promises and endearments that had been lavished on him during the last five minutes all would

be well. Caleb had been telling him, among other things, that he wouldn't touch a whip to him if only he would do his best like a dear old boy. The grey mare had already been pushed to the limit. Rob Roy had plenty—

"Go!"

The command broke in so loudly and suddenly upon Caleb's busy thoughts that he almost bounded from his seat as Rob Roy leaped forward. A ringing cheer followed the signal.

"Now, boy! We're at the tail end, but we won't stay there long. Go on, now! Go! Go! Go!"

The handsome bay gelding lit out as never before. He stepped high and clear as he fairly flew over the white road. Caleb felt the blood beating in his head as he leaned forward, almost over the dashboard, to talk to his horse.

"Good boy, Robbie! Ye're doin' fine! I knew ye could! We'll ketch em! There he is! See the coward hittin' his horse! Go on, Rob—ketch 'im! I ain't hittin' you, Rob, am I? Good boy, Rob! Go on!"

It was wonderful, the performance of Joel's old work horse. He developed remarkable speed, keeping ahead of Farineau's grey mare for an exasperating length of time. On past the bend they sped—and still on. Even when the pine ridge was reached the "plow horse" was leading the mare by a dozen lengths or more; but the poor beast was running away and had the bit in his teeth.

At the pine ridge the road narrowed. It was a dangerous place to race through, with logs on both sides, helter skelter, some close to the beaten track. Joel tried to guide old Bill carefully and keep him in the middle of the road, but he found to his alarm that the horse was beyond control. His blood was on fire. At the next turn in the road he failed to respond to the

guidance of the reins. Joel, exerting all his prodigious strength, brought the animal almost to his haunches, but the next instant he was off again, and not in the road. He had plunged to one side, dragging the cutter halfway into the tangle with him. A leap—a fall—and the poor beast was impaled upon a long sharp stump, utterly unable to extricate himself.

Joel was thrown into the air and fell almost under the feet of the writhing animal, whose heavy hoofs threatened at any moment to strike him. The man did not move; he was stunned by his fall.

Close behind came Farineau. He pulled his lines tight for an instant as he saw Joel lying in such imminent peril; then he relaxed them again, guided his mare carefully around the end of Joel's wrecked cutter and sped away toward home and the stakes which his friend Chabington held in safe keeping for him.

"Let the stable boy look after the farmer," he muttered.

Below the bridge a great crowd was waiting to see the finish of the race. Ned Jewel had come in some fifteen lengths in front of Pete Murray, after a hotly contested run home. His lead was a little more than enough to overcome Pete's handicap at the start. Both of them were greeted with ringing cheers, and Ned was overwhelmed with congratulations—but where were the others? Ned and Pete told of the time for leaving the half-way house, and also of Farineau's mishap on the outward trip, and of Caleb's rescue of his horse. Of the return they could say nothing. Five minutes passed—ten minutes. Down the road came Farincau, alone, his mare shambling along nervously, foam covered, almost a wreck. Nothing could be seen of Caleb nor Joel.

"Haven't seen the stable boy since I left him at the half-way house," was all the information Farineau would give.

Five minutes more passed. All eyes were strained anxiously up the road. Rob Roy certainly was a disappointment to many, or rather, Caleb's friends were disappointed that he himself should make such a bad showing—and many of them thought bitterly of the bets they had lost to Bartley.

A shout went up, "Here he comes!"

Dashing around the first bend in the road was a horse and cutter. As they drew nearer, a strange object was seen in the sleigh. A cry and a gasp broke from the crowd. "What's he got? What's the trouble? What's he yelling about?"

The cutter with its strange load was almost upon them; Caleb was leaning forward; his face distorted with terrible rage, and he was yelling in a frenzy of passion.

CHAPTER XXXIII

"KILL 'im! Kill the dog! Ketch 'im! The coward—the brute—the hellhound!—Here you—anybody—take Joel off my lap! Grab my horse, quick!"

Struggling, and shouting, Caleb pulled himself loose from his burden, and grabbing his whip, sprang from his cutter, and hurled himself in a perfect fury upon Farineau, slashing him wildly with the whip over his head, and shoulders, and legs—anywhere that he could reach. The crowd stood motionless with amazement for one brief instant, even Farineau made only a helpless, dazed defense at first. Then suddenly he pulled himself together and jerked a revolver from his pocket. The sight of this brought the bystanders to their senses, and both Farineau and Caleb were quickly seized and overpowered, while explanations were demanded.

"He stole the race! He's a coward! He's meaner than a cur! He seen Joel lyin' under his horse's hoofs, dead or dyin'—he didn't care which. He looked at 'im, an' went past an' left 'im without liftin' a hand to save 'im! Next minute would hev hed his brains knocked out—what did Hank care! All he wanted was to steal the race when he'd been beaten already. He'd been saved from a runaway an' smashup himself, an' now he goes by an' leaves Joel in a worse fix—his horse killed, his cutter smashed, an' him lyin' senseless! He ought to be hung!"

The outraged youth struggled hard to break away from the restraining hands. He shouted out his denunciations of Farineau in short, panting sentences. The crowd began to murmur angrily.

"Look at Rob Roy!" went on Caleb, pitifully. "He wanted to win, an' he could. I never teched a whip to 'im—he was goin' easy an' beautiful, like a bird—an' thet brute was murderin' his horse to steal the race—an' his horse an' sleigh would been smashed up at the bend if I hadn't caught 'em an' held 'em for 'im!"

Hisses and cries of "shame!" and "ingrate!" broke from many of the crowd. Several men moved threateningly towards Farineau. He saw the movement and wrenched himself loose from those who held him, sprang into his cutter, and started to drive off through the crowd. Two or three hands seized his mare's bridle.

"Drop that bridle, or I'll shoot you like a dog!" yelled Farineau, brandishing his revolver again.

As the men fell back, he dropped his pistol in the sleigh, snatched his whip, and struck his mare a sharp blow. She leaped forward, staggered a moment as though about to fall, and then kept on down the road followed by men and boys, shouting, hissing, and pelting the lawyer with lumps of snow and ice. One piece struck him full on the head, carrying away his hat. Still he urged his exhausted animal along until his pursuers were left in the rear, and gave up the chase to return to Caleb and Joel for further particulars.

Joel Bailey was not seriously injured. A bad cut on his head where he had fallen was all; no bones were broken, and he quickly recovered consciousness. Caleb had pulled him from under his horse's feet just in time to escape the poor beast's death struggle. Without stopping to ascertain the full extent of his injuries, but satisfied that he was still alive, the generous-hearted young fellow had dragged Joel into the cutter with him, knowing full well that by this second delay he had thrown away all chances of overtaking Farineau. To his surprise, he found that the throngs of his townspeople, and visitors from the countryside insisted on making him

a hero. More than that, they ignored the finishing time of the race altogether. The stories of Joel Bailey about the incident at the river bend, the testimony of Pete Murray, and the reports of spectators at the halfway house who began to arrive, all tended to prove Rob Roy's superiority over Farineau's mare, and Caleb's greater skill and judgment as a driver.

"Sure, ye won the race, me boy!" cried Pete Murray, slapping the young fellow encouragingly on the back. "Ye bate that dirty, mane-hearted rapscallion clean out of his boots! Niver mind the time ye finished. Ye bate the shyster good enough for me—ain't that so?" and he appealed to the crowd, which gave back approving shouts.

"Where's old Chabington? We'll tell him Hank's disqualified for fouling Caleb at the bend. He yanked his cutter 'round and threw him out of the race. That gives the race to Caleb, and the stakes, too."

The hotel keeper was nowhere to be found. A committee made up of the starters, timekeepers, and several other prominent villagers went up to the Sanitarium Hotel, and hunted through the town, to notify him that Farineau had been declared disqualified, and that he must not pay over any of the money in his hands to him or to others who had backed him. Chabington had disappeared as completely as though the earth had swallowed him. A rush was made for Bartley, who had placed many bets on his friend in Chabington's hands. He also was missing. Not one of the trio was seen again that day, and when found the next day at his hotel, tending the bar with perfect unconcern, Chabington declared, in a matter of fact tone, that he had turned all moneys he had held over to the winners.

"I don't know nothin' about any foul. There wa'n't any conditions about accidents. Hank came in a good five minutes ahead of Caleb, and I reckon that was mar-

gin enough to win. Caleb's stoppin' to help somebody else, or Hank not stoppin', is none of my business. They had a right to do as they pleased."

The public feeling against the three men as a result of these things became more than ever bitter. Some went so far as to declare that the whole affair was a put up job to get money, but they did not attempt to explain how the trick was planned. The one relieving feature of the situation was the fact that Mr. Stern held five hundred dollars of Farineau's money against a second race with Pete Murray.

"He may as well pay over the money to Pete," exclaimed Manny Matthews, to a group who were discussing the matter. "There was a good ten minutes between them this time, and Pete's horse hadn't been punished at all. Farineau's grey mare is a wreck, and the fellow is afraid to show his face. I'll bet he won't try another race."

"Lucky that Pete had the money put up with Stern instead of Chabington," remarked Jake Vogel.

Caleb Trimmer had been greatly comforted by the general verdict that his Rob Roy had really beaten Farineau's mare. He was comforted, also, by Pete Murray's generous promise to make good the forty dollars he had put up and the other forty dollars he ought to have won, out of Farineau's five hundred which would come to Pete in another month whether the second race was run or not. The young liveryman could not see why everybody made such a time over his stopping to help his rivals in their trouble. It was only the natural thing to do; anything else would have been impossible to him. But Farineau's meanness—that was the thing to call for notice—that was the unnatural, the despicable thing which should make people open their eyes with astonishment and disgust. To think that a man who had just been helped out of a dilemma himself should

leave another chap in a still worse fix without trying to help him—that was something Caleb could not understand, nor think of without rage flaming up in his breast. He tried not to think of it. It was enough for him that he stood vindicated in the eyes of his friends and acquaintances, and that he seemed to have more friends than ever before. He basked delightedly in the smiles and compliments of the pretty Midland girls, although he remembered with a pang of regret that the one girl before whom he wanted most to shine had not been a spectator of the race. She must have heard, though, he told himself. Rob Roy was the recipient of many loving attentions and confidences, as his master groomed him night and morning.

"They all say we beat 'im, Rob, an' so we did. Ye're all right, boy; I knew ye could do it; an' ye never got hit with the whip once, did ye, Robbie? Ye didn't see Bessie anywhere in the crowd, did ye, Rob? I wonder why she wa'n't there. We'll hev to go an' try again some day—mebbe; but ye mustn't run away with her again. Leave thet for me to do, Rob."

In a little upper room of a house on Ashman Street a young man sat alone, with his elbow on the back of his chair, and his head resting heavily on his hand. He looked through the open window, out upon the wintry scene, with eyes that saw nothing. His whole attention was concentrated upon the questions he had been asking himself over and over again during the past two days. He had asked them to no other man. The one man to whom he might have spoken concerning them was far away. He was alone with himself and the unseen.

"Am I like him?" he kept saying. The question was not vocal; it repeated itself in the silent recesses of his brain, or his heart, or his soul—he could not tell which.

"Am *I* like him? Am *I* an ingrate?"

The young man sat motionless in his chair as the light faded in the room. His face was rigid and full of trouble and uncertainty.

"Am I like him? Is he any worse than I was—than I am?"

A shiver passed over the young man. He rose suddenly, stretched his arms out with a gesture of insufficiency and appeal, and then sank to his knees beside the chair.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THROUGH the bright days and the stormy days of winter, whether the winds brought frost and blizzards from the Northwest, or drizzling rain from the East; through the long winter evenings alone with his books, or tramping over the snowy roads under the stars; through the busy hours of work in the printing room; in the cutter behind Zeke, flying through the white-robed country—wherever Ned Jewel went, and whatever occupied his time, the ghost of a wife he had not seen for five years fought with the image of a living, tangible, and more than all—a loving woman. The young man had always secretly prided himself on a strong will and a steadfast adherence to what he knew to be right, but he found that neither availed him in the struggle to forget his love for Bessie, or to reconcile himself to the bonds fastened upon him in the past. When he had received the first letter from his absent wife, she had suddenly seemed very real again, notwithstanding that he had, during the years since she ran away, gradually ceased to regard her as a living factor in his life. Now, as the months went by and she did not carry out her threat to come back to him, and he had only brief notes telling him where to send the monthly allowance, he began to lose again the sense of her imminence, if not of her reality. He dreaded to see her. Doubtless she would look very different from the girl he remembered of five years ago; but her face was fading from his mind, and he made no effort to retain the image. He hoped to keep it forever away from him.

Very different was that other face which haunted him night and day. Instead of becoming fainter, it grew more distinct—more insistent with the passage of time. It was more than a face which he saw—it was a breathing, speaking, laughing woman. The notes of her happy song rang in his ears; he saw every turn of her graceful body—every color in her cheek—every changing expression in her eyes; he felt the warm thrill from her fingers; he heard her pleading with him not to leave her since he loved her—and she loved him. The memories were full of pain, but such sweet pain that he gave over trying to put them away. He found that he could not do so, therefore he went to the other extreme and cherished them. They crowded out more rapidly the vision of her whom he wished to forget; yet that spectre intruded to mock at him and to threaten. He could not escape the facts, be they ever so pitiless.

Time and again as thoughts of Bessie swept over him, and he seemed to feel her nestling close by his side, the stress of his feelings was so great that he broke off abruptly in his work at the office and walked the floor impatiently. At such times it seemed difficult to breathe, or to think connectedly. Nothing but physical exertion relieved him. Often, in the evening, when he tried to read, a sense of suffocation came upon him, or an overpowering restlessness, and he threw down the book and went to walk in the open air.

One night, as he looked out from his window, he was struck with the brightness of the moonlight on the snow. How light everything was! He thought of that night by the beaver dam. Suddenly there came a rush of desire to go there. He put on his hat and coat and went out into the street before he realized the absurdity of his impulse. It was after nine o'clock on a winter's night. He returned to his room, but the thought had taken root. For several days he considered the matter

pro and con. Why increase his misery by visiting a place which would make his forbidden happiness more real—which would tantalize him with the reminder of joys that could never be his? Why weaken his own power of endurance and make it still more impossible to bear his lot patiently? What if anyone on the farm should see him? What if Mr. Brinton, or Bartley, or someone else from the village should see him going into or coming out of Oakdale? Suppose he should meet Bessie herself! His better judgment told him not to go, and he listened to his better judgment for several days; but his love, together with that uncontrollable restlessness, kept urging him on. It could do no harm. He knew perfectly well what the situation was; certainly he had no idea of flying in the face of facts; but if he could find delight and comfort, even mixed with pain, dallying alone with sweet memories which could never be anything more than memories, what was there wrong in the indulgence?

The inevitable outcome of such parleying with his conscience was a yielding to the promptings of his desire. One quiet Sunday morning, immediately after breakfast, Ned put on his top boots and heavy reefer and stole away in the direction of Oakdale farm. He avoided the usual road on the east, choosing, instead, the short cut to the west. Not only would he save nearly a mile, but he would run less risk of meeting anyone going to or from Oakdale. Besides, the Westman road would take him directly to the sand ridge on the western boundary of the farm, near the base of which was the beaver dam.

He glanced furtively up and down the street as he left his boarding house to see if anyone might be watching him. As he turned into the Westman road he looked around again, nervously. He felt guilty, and it seemed to him as if anyone who might chance to see him would

be sure to know the secret of his trip. He tramped on in the beaten track of the road, his heart throbbing violently, as though the excursion were fraught with some unknown danger. No snow had fallen for several days, but a heavy mantle lay over the fields and in the woods. For more than a mile he walked without seeing any sign of life. He was watching the road both in front and behind him to prevent being surprised. Then a warning jingle of bells coming from the direction of the village caused him to look around hastily for some place to hide. No shed was near enough, and the bushes along the roadside were only bare, thin skeletons. A large beech tree stood just the other side of a farm fence to his right. He leaped through the snow and climbed over the fence, gaining the shelter of the tree just as a cutter came flying around the nearest turn in the road. By standing straight and close against the tree trunk and edging around it as the sleigh drew near and passed, Ned kept himself hid, but he saw the occupant of the cutter. It was Manny Matthews. If he had seen Ned on the road, he would certainly have stopped and asked questions—perhaps insisted upon taking him into the sleigh. That would have been embarrassing; but if Manny had caught sight of him hurrying over the fence, or hiding behind the tree! How could he ever have satisfied the fellow's curiosity or stifle his suspicions? Ned felt positively weak and trembling as he returned to the road. For a moment he was inclined to turn back, but the magnetism of Bessie's presence, lingering, in his fancy, at the beaver dam, drew him on in spite of his panic.

At the ridge he hesitated, uncertain how far to follow the road before striking off into the woods. He had never approached the dam from this point, and found it difficult to recognize the place in winter. Along the base of the ridge, he remembered, the meadow and the

woodland ran in an irregular strip, and the meadow brook joined with another brook which followed the ridge to the north. Just beyond this juncture, in a little valley which ran partly within the woods and partly in a bit of the meadow, was the beaver dam. Ned fixed the locality as well as he could in his mind, continuing along the ridge road until almost to the northwesterly extremity of the farm. Then he plunged into the naked forest and down the easterly side of the ridge. The snow was above his boot tops in many places, but he did not care. He pushed on to the edge of the meadow and took his bearings. An expanse of white lay before him where on his first visit he had seen fresh green grass and sweet wild flowers. The trees stood bare and black against the snow. A little depression winding through the white field marked where the brook lay asleep. He followed the line to his left and noted where, a little farther on, it entered the miniature valley. There, he knew, was the beaver dam, the shrine made sacred by love. Skirting the meadow just within the edge of the woods, in order that his tracks might not be so fully exposed, he made his way into the little valley. There was no sign of running water. The pond above the dam was hardly discernible. The snow had drifted in below, leaving only a slight ridge to mark where the logs lay on which Bessie had tried to cross. Everything was buried out of sight by the cold white crystals. A chilly wind swept mournfully down through the trees. Ned shivered, more from the desolate aspect of the place than from the cold. How like it was to his own experience! No more warmth and life seemed left for him. All the fragrance, and beauty, and tenderness of which he had been given one brief glimpse were buried out of sight by a cold, relentless fate, and an icy wind of misery swept over his passion. Yet the sun continued to smile down from a cloudless sky. Was it mocking him, or bid-

ding him hope? With a sudden impulse he reached for a low-hanging branch and broke it off and began to write on the snow—"I love you!" He looked at the words, and then glanced nervously around him. No one was in sight, not a sound came to his ears except the wind in the trees, but he hastily obliterated the writing. It seemed to cry out as if to betray him. He began to reason with himself. Who would ever find him out in such a place? Surely nobody would dream of penetrating to this far corner through the deep snow in the dead of winter. His love could be uttered here with perfect safety. Again he wrote with the broken branch in the snow—"I love you!" and, turning around, stole away through the woods as he had come. Let the winds and the snow cover his secret if they chose. For the present, he felt that it was safely hidden in the heart of his "foster mother" Nature.

During the remainder of the day Ned experienced a sense of exhilaration almost akin to happiness. It seemed as if he had actually been in communion with his dear love, and yet in a way that could cause no increase of his trouble or hers; but as another clear day, and still another, followed, this feeling was succeeded by a growing nervousness lest some one should discover his shrine and the words he had written there. It was with positive relief that he watched a storm of wind and snow sweep over the country on the third day and knew that Mother Nature had in fact sealed his secret in her bosom.

Before long, the same desire to visit his lonely trysting place took possession of him again. The fact that it was snowbound did not deter him. On the contrary, it was his assurance that no one else would intrude upon the sacred spot. Its very inaccessibility preserved it to him alone, and made it possible to confide his love to the intangible presence which seemed to hover over the

little valley. He found no traces of his previous visit. Wind and snow had smoothed over his tracks, and the beaver dam was even less plainly marked than before. Again he took a broken branch and wrote on the clean white surface, close to where he and Bessie had sat together—"I love you!" He made the lettering larger and deeper that it might remain if possible until he should come again; but the snow was dry and loose, and as he watched the fine particles sifting back into the little furrows, he knew that his thought was vain—his message would soon be gone from sight, as though written on the sands of the sea. It was the inexorable hand of fate, he felt, which obliterated the words. It was a silent rebuke from his Mother Nature. He had no right to tell his love, even to the snow flakes, which with their cold purity so quickly hid his passionate confession. Yet again and again, through the winter he went to the little valley of the beaver dam which was growing ever more precious to him, and always when he came away he left, written in the snow, the same outcry from his longing heart—"I love you!"

Then there came a day when he went for the last time. Spring rains and mild south winds had melted away much of the snow, but still it lay deep in the woods, although here and there in the open meadow bare patches peeped through. The little brook awoke from its sleep, and, throwing off its white coverlid, went rippling and gurgling down to the dam where it fell over upon the soft pillow below and disappeared from sight for a spell until it should succeed in carrying away the pillow also. No snow had fallen for more than a fortnight, and as Ned came into the little valley by the path which he had worn through the snow from the ridge, he saw that the words he had written the week before were still plainly outlined on the snow, and even parts of an earlier writing remained near by. But all at once something else

caught his eye, and he stood transfixed. Then he sprang forward, trembling with excitement. Other footprints than his own were in the snow. They came close to the spot where he had written "I love you," and then turned back the same way they had come. He hastened along for some distance following the footprints. They came, undoubtedly, from the direction of the house. He stooped to examine several of them closely where the moist snow held their form unbroken. They were small —very small.

"Bessie!" he cried; "it's Bessie!"

She had found him out! What would she think of him, daring to trespass on her retreat and give expression to his love—a married man! Why had he not taken into his reckoning the possibility that she might penetrate to the little valley as soon as the snow barrier was broken? It was her favorite spot, she had said, and she often came there alone. What more natural than that she should come at the first opportunity after being shut in from her fields and woods through the long winter? Of course she would know who had been there, and she must resent his coming, in the circumstances. It could only open afresh the wounds which nothing but time could heal.

Ned hastened back to the dam with but one thought as to what he must do. He must erase, so far as possible all evidences of his trespass. With a few sweeps of a stick he obliterated the writing in the snow, and began trying to smooth over his own foot prints; but he found the latter task utterly hopeless. With a sigh and a beating heart he took a last yearning look upon the loved spot and upon the little foot prints leading away towards the house, and then turned his steps again in the direction of Midland.

On the afternoon of the same day a small girlish figure in a brown dress and rubber boots stole into the woods

from the west beaver meadow. She followed the line of the footprints Ned had discovered until she noticed other larger footprints alongside her own path. She stopped in alarm and listened, poising as if to flee. Hearing no sound, she went on at length, slowly and cautiously, peering ahead through the trees. Coming at last to the dam, she looked eagerly around in the snow. What she looked for she did not see—what she saw she had not looked for. Disappointment and pain filled her pretty eyes. Tears began to drop upon her soft cheeks. All at once her "favorite spot" seemed to hold no attraction for her. She, likewise, turned and fled to her home.

CHAPTER XXXV

On the steps of the Post Office a group of men were engaged in angry, excited discussion. They all seemed to be of one mind. The object of their anger evidently was not present, unless it might be a newspaper which one of the men held up every now and then for the others to see, and which they all seemed to regard with repugnance and indignation. In the real estate office of Mr. Stern, in Wilson's harness shop, at Hiram Visger's feed store, on the street corners—all over Midland, men were discussing the same matter, and always with black looks and threatening words.

The fact was that the moral sensibilities of the County Seat were suffering with a severe attack of nausea. The literary dish which had been forced upon the town by William Harrington Bartley for so long had finally caused a gastronomic revolt. While its real tainted character had been in a measure concealed by the condiment of wit and smartness, many tolerated it, and there were some who enjoyed it. Of late, however, the condiment had grown too weak and insufficient to make the stuff go down. Even those who had thought they relished the dish found that it was bad. Its rancid taste and putrid smell were no longer hidden. They could be no longer tolerated.

Moreover, the personal behavior of the purveyor of this unwholesome dish was growing worse continually. The indecency and insolence of his paper were even more exaggerated in his conversation. Heretofore, he had maintained some appearance of respectability, together

with at least a pretense of suave politeness; but during the winter that had just passed these had fallen from him like a cloak. He had been drinking more heavily than his wont, and the recklessness which resulted caused him to defy all rules of decency and even of personal safety.

In addition to all this were the many suspicions of his honesty, and the grievances without number held by persons whom he had insulted or induced to invest money in losing enterprises. Few indeed of the citizens of Midland but had suffered in one way or another from the busy editor of *Chips* during the comparatively brief term of his activity in the community.

The immediate cause of so general an outburst of indignation was a vicious article in the current number of *Chips*. George Stern, who held the mortgage on the Sanitarium hotel property—the name having been changed to Chabington's hotel since the failure of the managers to use their mineral well to attract patrons—had refused to wait any longer for overdue interest, and had taken steps to foreclose. He was the more willing to do this because he was convinced that the spring water had genuine medicinal qualities which would prove valuable if the property were rightly managed, and he believed foreclosure proceedings would bring it into his control. In revenge for his action, Bartley had published a thinly disguised attack on Stern and his beautiful wife, both of whom were among the most respected characters in the village. No names were mentioned, but everyone knew at once against whom the attack was aimed, and every man in town felt compelled to join in punishing the author of the insult.

"I move we all go 'round to Bart's place an' tell him he's got to quit printin' sech stuff, or we'll right soon make him," suggested Hiram Visger, one of the group

at the Post Office, after all had expressed their opinion several times with increasing vehemence.

"We ought to make him apologize an' print it on the front page," declared Willis Lamson.

"D'ye know what I'd do, boys?" demanded old "Cap." Walton. "I'd go down there an' clean the whole vile shop out an' tell Bart to make tracks out o' town an' never come back—that's what I'd do!"

"You bet! That's jest what we ought to do," agreed Hiram. "Let's go now; there's five of us here."

"I don't know about the cleanin' out business, maybe we ought to go a little slow on that, but I'll go with the crowd to warn him an' make him apologize," said Peter Hale, the gunsmith.

"Better get Stern to go with us," suggested Arthur Renwick. "He's the one directly injured. It would make the thing look more like business."

Half an hour later six resolute men mounted the stairs to the office of *Chips* and demanded to see the editor. The door of Bartley's editorial office was open, and hearing the unusual noise, coupled with the loud demand, Bartley came to his door holding a pen in his hand.

"Well, what do you want?" he snapped. "Come to pay your subscriptions?"

"Not much, we haven't!" exclaimed Cap. Walton, the eldest of the party. "This here gentleman is Mr. Stern—you know him well enough. We're his friends and neighbors. You printed an article this week that was meant to reflect on Mr. Stern and his wife, and we want—"

"Is that all you want?" interrupted Bartley. "Is that all you came for—to whimper over other people's affairs?"

"We demand—Mr. Stern demands—the entire decent element of Midland demands an apology, and a promise that—"

"Get out of here, the whole lot of you!" yelled Bartley, with an angry oath. "What do you come bothering me with such baby talk for when I'm busy? Go on! Clear out!" and the editor turned back into his private office and slammed the door.

The six men looked at each other in silence for a moment as they heard the key turn in the lock. Cap. Walton was a trifle sheepish, but showed no intention of retreating. Neither did Mr. Stern, who had let the older man do the talking only because he feared to lose control of himself.

In a moment Bartley opened the door again and, poking his head out, called to Denny, the boy.

"Where's that sign, Denny, 'This is my busy day —no admittance except on business?' Get it and hang it on the outside door."

"Look here, Bill Bartley, we're here on business, mighty important business. You'll find it's the most serious business of the day if you try to get out of it," exclaimed Stern, but the editor's door slammed again in the faces of his visitors.

Cap. Walton made a move toward the corner of the printing room where the little private office was located.

"Come out here, you skunk, you coward!" he yelled. "Come out here, or we'll break in an' pull you out! Come on, boys, we'll kick the door in an' make him listen."

"Better not try it," said Jake Crawford, Bartley's foreman, who, with Nell, young Chabington, and Denny, had been watching the affair with suppressed excitement. "Bart has a gun in there, an' he keeps it loaded."

As he spoke a pistol shot was heard inside the office, and a piece of wood was splintered off from the thin partition just above Cap. Walton's head by the passage of the bullet.

"Let the fellow stay, if he's afraid to come out. We'll soon find a way to get at him, and it'll be just so much the worse for him; but we don't want a fight here," was Renwick's advice, which the others reluctantly accepted. It seemed too much like defeat to walk away without accomplishing anything in the face of Bartley's defiance.

The report of the interview got around town immediately and greatly augmented the angry feeling against the editor of *Chips*. Before night there was a general demand for some definte action that would rid the town of both him and his paper. A number of hot-heads were for going at once to wreck his establishment, claiming that it would do no good to proceed against him legally, because he had always been smart enough to avoid, technically, the violation of the letter of the law in printing his paper. If he had been guilty of any of the other crimes of which so many persons suspected him, he had managed to hide the proof. The cooler heads advised deliberation. Better the counsel and cooperation of many than the hasty action of a few individuals. By common consent, a meeting was called for the same evening in the street in front of the Post Office. It was to be fair and open for all citizens to attend. The notice flew from mouth to mouth, and long before the time appointed a crowd began to gather. The Postmaster's store was lighted with lamps, a box for the chairman was arranged on the steps, and two or three campaign torches added to the illumination. George Stern was called upon to take the chair, but he declined on the ground that he was too personally interested.

"Nonsense!" cried old Cap. Walton, "we're all personally interested, ain't that so, boys?"

"You bet!" "Sure we are!" "Take the chair yourself!" cried the crowd.

Nothing suited the fiery old man better, and he hammered on the box for attention.

"This ain't no Sunday School convention, nor peace conference!" he shouted.

"Right you are!" "Give it to him!" "Bully for you!"

"We're here to devise ways an' means for the public safety—to protect our families—to show that we care something about the decency an' morals o' the town."

"Hear! Hear!" "That's the talk!"

"There's a nuisance in our midst that we don't propose to put up with no longer. It's got to be cleaned out."

"That's right! Clean out Bart an' his rotten sheet!"

"A skunk has been runnin' loose in Midland, an' our nostrils can't stand it any longer. What are we goin' to do about it?"

"Clean him out!" "Hunt him out o' town!" "Give him a dose o' mineral water!"

"It ain't likely that 'Caleb's cure' would do him any good," went on the orator, referring to the last suggestion; "but we mustn't forgit that the honor and dignity o' the County Seat o' Midland County demands his removal. It also demands that the thing be done decently an' in order. This ain't a matter o' personal revenge, though like enough all of us has got some little account we'd like to settle. We can't exactly put the impudent offender in jail, 'cause he's too clever to give us a chance. He's been suspected time an' again o' violatin' the law, but somehow or nuther we never could git downright proof, but now—"

"He robbed the Post Office!" cried a voice from the outskirts of the crowd, and then suddenly was still. All turned quickly toward the spot whence the voice came. There was an excited rustle, and a babel of questions broke loose.

"Who was that?" called Cap. Walton from the stand. "Come forrard an 'tell us what you know."

"It's Percy! He don't want to come," exclaimed Hiram Visger.

"Bring him up here!" commanded the chairman, sternly.

Several men seized the dwarf and hustled him through the crowd and up the steps to the speaker's stand, where he stood, scared but defiant in the glare of the torches.

"You say Bartley, the editor of *Chips*, robbed the Midland Post Office?" asked Cap. Walton.

"He did," said Percy, with a short grunt.

"How do you know he did?" demanded the Chairman.

"I know it—I heard him say so!"

"You heard him say so! By heavens! When?"

"Don't know—some time before winter—no, I mean I heard somebody tell him he did. Course he denied it."

"Who was it you heard tell him so?"

The dwarf made no reply.

"Come, out with it! We're just dyin' to git a holt o' just such a thing; then we can put him in jail where he can't do no more harm."

Still the dwarf was silent and sullen. He seemed to have been caught off his guard and was now on the defensive.

"What's the matter? Ain't you goin' to tell what you know?"

"I can't tell no more—I dassen't," muttered Percy.

"Oh, that's it, is it? Well you needn't be afraid; we won't let him hurt you. Just tell us who 'twas you heard talkin' to him. We'll do the rest."

"I ain't afreed o' him, but—"

No amount of urging and threatening could get any more information out of the fellow. He remained

stubborn. It had come into his mind like a flash, as soon as he had uttered his accusation, that Nell would be implicated if he told of hearing her conversation with Bartley in *Chips'* office.

"We'll have to look into this an' let somebody else ask you who can make you tell," declared Cap. Walton impatiently, as he gave up his useless examination. "The point we want to settle now," he went on to the crowd, "is what to do with Bill Bartley an' his paper. We can't arrest him on the mere say so of this boy, without anything to back it up, an' we can't let him go on makin' a nuisance of himself here in town. If anybody has a plan, let's hear it quick."

"I move we appoint a committee to—" began someone in the crowd; but he was interrupted by protests from those who had appointed themselves a committee earlier in the day.

"Committee's no good if he won't see them," declared Renwick. "Why not just nail a notice on his door telling him it is the order of this meeting that he shut up his shop and quit the town for good within three days or stand the consequences?"

"Yes!" "Second the motion!" "Make it good an' strong!" cried several approving voices.

The plan went through with a rush, Renwick, Stern, and Walton being appointed to draw up the notice, and put it in place on the door of Bartley's printing room. As the meeting was about to break up, having concluded its business, Jake Crawford, Bartley's foreman, who had hung around the outskirts of the crowd, a silent observer of events, announced in a casual manner, "Reckon you've been to all your trouble for nothin'. Bartley left town this noon, an' said I shouldn't look for him till he came back, an' he didn't know when that would be."

CHAPTER XXXVI

The editor of *Chips* had, indeed, disappeared from Midland City leaving no hint as to his errand, or his destination, or the probable time of his return. His foreman could tell nothing more than he had already told except that Bartley had hinted that when he did return he would have something unusually interesting for *Chips*. Inquiries at Chabington's hotel were fruitless. Mrs. Bartley, the much abused and neglected, but ever faithful wife, had not even known that her husband was going out of town. There were not wanting many who said the man had skipped to escape the storm he had raised, and that he would doubtless stay away until it blew over. Others said he would have to wait a long time, and that, as a bad penny always turns up, he would probably be back before he was wanted. Nell Tompkins volunteered no opinions, but she was conscious of a vague alarm, and determined to be on the watch for the earliest developments.

Notwithstanding the disappearance of their man, the "Committee on Abolishing Nuisances," as Cap. Walton styled it, visited the office of *Chips* and tacked their notice on the door, warning the members of the crew not to remove it if they did not wish to be included.

Several days passed without any word from the missing editor. No attempt was made to issue the paper, partly because copy was lacking, and partly because neither Crawford nor Nell was willing to assume the responsibility and the odium of publishing the dis-

credited sheet. Indeed, Jake Crawford had been seen to enter Mr. Brinton's office one morning, where he remained closeted with the editor of *The Pioneer* for half an hour or more. He said nothing to anyone about his mysterious visit, but it was noticed that he evinced less than ever concern over Bartley's absence, and no inclination to have things in readiness for his return. One morning as he and Nell chanced to come into the printing room together she caught him smiling with a look suspiciously like satisfaction as his eye took in the notice nailed there by the committee.

"That seems to please you," said Nell questioningly. "Would you be glad to see Bart driven out of town?"

"Hey?" exclaimed Jake guiltily. "What makes you think so?"

"Oh, you looked that way just now," replied the girl, but did not press her question.

"What's the use o' hangin' 'round here doin' nothin'? You might's well take a day off. I'll look after the shop," said Crawford to Joe Chabington a little later, as he found the young fellow lolling at one of the windows.

"All right, if you say so, an' are willing to square it with the old man if he comes in," replied Joe, glad to avail himself of the permission. In a few minutes he had put on his coat and gone out, whistling.

"Guess you won't be wanted today, Denny," Jake told the boy after he had attended to his few regular chores. The "devil" stood not on the order of his going, but went at once.

"I don't see why I should stay," remarked Nell. "Guess I'll go home, too."

"Wait a minute, Nell. I got some business an'—somethin' I want to talk over with you. Don't go yet."

"Is that so? What is it?" asked the girl suspiciously.

Jake fidgeted and cleared his throat nervously. "Say,

Nell, how are you feelin' 'bout Bart? Are you in a hurry for him to come back?"

"What do you want to know for? Are you?"

"Not by a jugful! I'm done with him, 'n I'm goin' to tell him so when he comes back. I was kinder anxious to know how you felt about it."

"Why what difference does it make to you?"

"It makes a lot o' difference. I've got a plan."

"Well, go on," said Nell after waiting a minute for him to continue. The foreman seemed greatly embarrassed.

"Mr. Brinton's ready to give me a job on *The Pioneer* any time I like. One o' his crew's goin' away. I'll git the same's I git now, an' more after awhile. I don't spend much money, an' I got six hundred dollars in the bank, besides the house that came to me when the old folks died."

"My! you don't say! Bart'll be crazy to have you go to *The Pioneer*."

"I ain't thinkin' about Bart. I don't give a hang whether he likes it or not. I'm thinkin' about you."

"Oh, you needn't mind me. It won't bother me long. I'm thinking of giving up my job, too."

"Are you?" Jake spoke eagerly. "I'm mighty glad to hear it. Don't you like Bart?"

"I hate him!"

"Good! Say, Nell, you've had a hard time of it, here, an' now you ought to have it easier. Let's you an' me git married. I think a heap of you, an' I'd like nothin' better than to work hard an' make a nice home for you to boss. Will you?"

The big fellow stood leaning one elbow on Nell's type case, and he looked earnestly into her face for some sign of encouragement. He saw kindness there, but not consent. She did not reply at once. Her mind flew back to an evening months before when she had had a plan

and had found it futile. Since then she had been without any guiding star—without any hope of joy to come. Her only aims were the ones which had already formed and become habits. One was to free herself from Bartley as soon as she could find some other way to support herself and her mother. Another was to thwart any scheme he might have to injure Ned. She had fixed this purpose so firmly in her mind during the past year or more that it remained active even when she knew Ned could never be any more to her than a friend. At least she would justify the friendship. And she hated Bartley. It would be a satisfaction to stand in the way of his success in any rascality he might be planning.

"Will you, Nell?" repeated Jake. "I've always liked you more'n I ever did any other woman. I'd never stayed here's long's I have if 'twan't for you. I've always hoped we might git married sometime. I'll treat you right, Nell."

"I don't know, Jake; I'm afraid I can't; I guess I couldn't love you enough. Besides, I've got my mother to look after. You couldn't be burdened with both of us."

"I guess I could, Nell. I'd work hard, an' wouldn't spend money on drink, an' we wouldn't have any rent to pay."

Nell hesitated. She knew Jake was a sober, good-hearted fellow who, doubtless, would do his best to make her comfortable and happy; and she could help if his income should prove insufficient for their needs; but she did not love him; he was not the kind of man she would choose as her life companion. If only Ned—Jake seemed to be reading her thoughts:

"Is there somebody else you do love?" he asked, anxiously. "Has that Jewel fellow got ahead o' me?"

"Nobody has got ahead of you, Jake; and I don't know of anybody who is likely to; but I'd rather not say

anything more about it just now. I can't say yes—— not now."

"But you don't say no? You'll think about it, won't you? Maybe after a while I can ask you again, can't I, Nell?"

"Maybe."

CHAPTER XXXVII

For two weeks Midland had been free from the obnoxious sight of the ribald editor and his noisome paper. Even the few personal adherents who remained to him began to think that he was gone for good, though they could not understand his sudden freak. The office of *Chips* was closed, his crew having given up the practice of going there in the morning to see if the editor had returned; but the notice of the committee's warning remained on the door. Jake Crawford was definitely installed in *The Pioneer* office, peacefully indifferent to whether his former chief ever came back or not. He was out only a few days' wages. It was worth that much to be free from an uncongenial position. Nell was staying at home with her mother, and Joe Chabington had gone to help his father in the hotel.

Suddenly Bartley returned. The crew of *The Pioneer* heard him stamping up the stairs about the middle of the afternoon, and then heard his furious swearing as he read the notice on his door and found his office deserted. In a few minutes they heard him slam his door again and go noisily down to the street, still swearing. He was evidently in a state of semi-intoxication.

News of his return flew like wild-fire through the town, and a still more sensational item of gossip was coupled with the news. A strange woman had come to Chabington's hotel, and refused to see anyone or to be seen. Some said that Bartley had brought her. At the hotel it was given out that she had come alone; but several persons at the railway station declared that they

had seen the woman and Bartley get off the train together and stand talking earnestly with each other before they separated. These witnesses also said that the woman was young and pretty, but dissipated in appearance. Further than that they could give no information except that she had no baggage other than a small hand satchel.

About an hour later Ned Jewel hurried into Mr. Brinton's private office, shut the door hastily behind him, and sank heavily into a chair. He was pale and trembling.

"She's here!" he gasped, holding out a letter.

"Who's here? What in the world is the matter with you, Ned?" exclaimed Brinton.

"Read that!"

Brinton opened the letter and glanced at its contents with a quick thrill of alarm.

"Heavens! That *is* bad," he said impulsively; "but you can't do what she demands. Besides, this is blackmail; she ought to be arrested!"

"And make matters worse than they are? I couldn't stand it."

"You've been sending her right along the amount you agreed to send?"

"Yes—every dollar; and now she must have five hundred by to-night, or she'll come out openly and disgrace me."

"H'm—you're in no shape to deal with her, Ned. I'll go myself this evening and see what can be done."

The coming of the mysterious woman struck alarm to the heart of another person besides Ned Jewel. One of the first to hear the gossip was Nell Tompkins, and she believed without an instant of doubt that Bartley had brought the woman to Midland. She thought she knew the reason, and it filled her with hot indignation as well

as a sense of panic. Bartley had broken his promise to her. He was planning to do as he had threatened months ago when he had asked her help. She could not doubt it. She was sure he had lied to her at the time in what he had told her about Ned; but she was equally convinced that there was some kind of foundation for his lies—enough, at any rate, to make it possible for him to do as he was now doing. No time must be lost if his wicked plan was to be thwarted. She hurried to the office of *Chips*. It was locked. The only other place at which she could hope to find Bartley was Chabington's hotel, and thither she hastened. A crowd was hanging about the place; but she did not stop to wonder over the cause, nor to notice the angry looks and loud voices. Young Chabington, in the office, told her that Bartley was in the bar-room with "the old man."

"Go in there and tell him I must see him at once," said Nell.

Joe obeyed and brought back the reply that Bart refused to come out.

"You tell him he's got to come out!" cried the girl, stamping her foot. "If he don't he'll have to take the consequences. Tell him I said so."

In a few minutes Bartley appeared, staggering slightly.

"Hello, Nell!" he exclaimed with a string of oaths. "Want to see me? What are you in such a hurry about? Now don't look so mad, dearie."

"Stop your impudence, and find some place where I can talk to you on business at once—alone."

Bartley hesitated, leering at her disagreeably.

"At once! do you hear?"

"Oh, certainly I hear. Joe, kindly retire; the lady wants to visit me alone—do you hear?"

"Yes, Joe; but don't go far, in case I should have to call for help; Bart's drunk," snapped the girl.

The junior Chabington went out of the office and shut the door.

"See here, Bart, I've got to talk quick, and so have you," exclaimed Nell in a low but excited tone. "Who is this woman they're all talking about, who came today? Did you bring her here, and why?"

"What woman, my dear? I don't know what you're talking about," replied the man insolently, but glancing toward the door with a nervous manner.

"Yes you do! don't lie about it. I want to know who that woman is and what she's here for—quick."

"How should I know who Chab's guests are, and their private business?"

"Come now, Bart, that bluff won't work. You brought that woman here. What's the use of denying it?"

"Well, what if I did?"

The editor, finding Nell would not accept his plea of ignorance, adopted a defiant attitude.

"What did you bring her for? What deviltry are you and she up to?"

"None of your business!"

"It isn't, eh? Well, I'm going to make it my business. I have my own suspicions, and I'll bet they're pretty near right. You tried last year to get me mixed up in some blackmail scheme, and that must be what you're up to now. You promised to give up the idea. You seem to forget what I know and what I have to prove it."

"Ah, you're talking rubbish, Nell; you'd better go home and mind your own business and leave me to mind mine. I've bothered with you too much already."

"Oh, have you? It wasn't so long ago you were begging me not to throw up my job and leave you in a hole. But that's neither here nor there. I just want you to understand that if you don't drop your game with this woman, whoever she is, and get her away from here

before tomorrow morning, I'll do what I told you last year I would. You know what that is."

"More rubbish, my dear. You know perfectly well that nobody would believe your yarn at this late day, even if you tell it. But you won't; you know that it would hurt you more than it would me, and you're afraid. That little bluff has outlived its usefulness."

"You'll find out! Are you going to do as I say, or not?"

"No, I am not!" snarled Bartley, swearing viciously. "I'm going to do just as I please. Don't bother me!"

"I *will* bother you! And you *won't* do as you please—I won't let you!" exclaimed the girl angrily, as she retreated to the door and made her escape from the hotel. She was both angry and frightened. She had hoped to deter Bartley by threats as she had done before, but he was drunk and reckless and evidently prepared to go to any risks to carry out his desperate plan. Nell saw only one alternative. She dreaded it, but did not hesitate.

Hurrying back to Benson Street she knocked at the door of *The Pioneer* office. When Percy came to open it, she stood aside to avoid being seen, and in a whisper told him to send Jake Crawford out into the hall. The big fellow responded with alacrity.

"Jake, I want you to do me a favor—a great favor—and don't mention it to a soul," she whispered excitedly.

"Why, sure, I'll do it. Don't matter what it is; I'll do anything you want me to."

"I knew you would, Jake. You know that woman Bart brought to town today? She's at Chabington's hotel."

"I heard 'em talkin' about her."

"Jake, she's here to do a wicked thing. Bart has put her up to it? I want you to get her away before she does it!"

The printer looked at her in astonishment. He was utterly unprepared for such a strange request.

"What in the name o' goodness—do you mean it, Nell? How in blazes am I goin' to git the woman away?"

"I don't know, Jake; but it's got to be done, and quick, too. There isn't anybody else I'd ask to do it but you." She looked up into his face with a glance which made him willing to go through fire or water for her. But he was completely at a loss for the means to carry out her commands.

"It's getting late, Jake," she urged. "You'll be through here soon, anyway. Can't you go now? Frighten the woman into leaving by the evening train. Tell her a warrant is out for her arrest for blackmailing. That will be very near the truth, and she'll believe it, unless I'm very much mistaken. Get her away somehow, and frighten her so that she'll never dare to come back."

"Thunderation, what a job! Well, I'll try my hand at it just 'cause you say so, Nell; but nothin' else could make me tackle it."

"If you'll get her away tonight, Jake, before she does anybody any harm, I'll—*maybe* I'll—marry you!"

The next instant the girl had fled down the stairs leaving the dumbfounded printer to figure on the strangest task and the most blissful reward that had ever fallen to his lot.

But Nell's work was only begun. The hardest part yet remained. She dared not think about it for fear it would grow too hard. If she could be sure that Jake would accomplish the task she had set him, she would be content to let the rest go, but she was far from sure, and there must be no uncertainty. In a few minutes after leaving Jake, she was at the Post Office demanding a private interview with the Postmaster. She had noticed with only casual attention the excited crowd around the steps. Her mind was fixed on one thing

alone, and pressing haste urged her on to attend to that one thing before it should be too late. For several minutes she was closeted in a back room with the Postmaster; then he called his boy and hurriedly sent for Mr. Stern, Mr. Heald, and Mr. Hemingway, three of the leading citizens of the town. After another brief interval, Mr. Stern came out alone, but returned later with Patrick Hogan, the watchman. It was dark when the conference broke up, and Mr. Hemingway went off in search of Justice Rogers to secure three warrants for the arrest of persons suspected of robbing the Midland Post Office more than a year ago.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

The village of Midland City was in an uproar. The popular indignation against Bartley had by no means cooled during his two weeks' absence; the fires had merely smoldered, and his brazen return with a strange woman caused them to blaze up hotly. None but Jewel, Brinton, and Nell Tompkins had any definite knowledge concerning the woman, and even they were more or less in the dark as to Bartley's knowledge of her. The generally accepted theory was that he had foisted her on the town in impudent disregard of public decency and the presence of his own wife in the same hotel.

The editor's noisy, half-drunken behavior, and his outspoken defiance of the entire community when he tore down the notice from his office door, swearing that he would stay and publish *Chips* as long as he pleased, and that the next number would outdo all previous issues, had added fuel to the flames of wrath. Crowds gathered quickly at all available points throughout the village to discuss the matter. One group had gone to his office with sticks and horsewhips, but finding the place deserted and the door locked they hurried away to the hotel to join the crowd already gathered there, waiting for Bartley to show his face.

No one had any definite plan at first, or rather there were almost as many plans as there were men. The prevailing thought was that Bartley had been tolerated long enough, that his last day of grace was at an end,

and that speedy punishment must be meted out to him before he could slip out of their grasp again. Like swarms of angry bees the citizens of Midland congregated on the streets and in the various meeting places. All were scolding, threatening, urging this or that plan for proceeding against the obnoxious editor. Some went home for supper and then hurried back to the storm center, which by common consent was the neighborhood of Chabington's hotel. Others forgot all about supper, so intent were they upon settling accounts with Bartley.

In general, there were three divisions among the people of Midland as darkness settled on the town. The first and smallest consisted of the little group of men who had gone in search of Justice Rogers to secure three warrants for the arrest of certain suspected criminals. Not more than half a dozen persons knew of this proceeding. In the second division were the quieter and more conservative citizens, who, while sharing the popular feeling against Bartley, did not believe in any ill-considered outburst of passion which might lead to acts of violence and bring discredit upon the town. Such persons, for the most part, stayed in their homes, although a few of these felt it to be their duty to be on the ground to watch the progress of affairs and prevent, if possible, any rash deeds. The third, by far the largest division, included the bulk of the people, who were clamoring loudly for Bartley to show himself and take his medicine. All the boys and younger men of the town helped to swell the crowds and the noise. Caleb Trimmer was one of the most demonstrative. As night came on, tin horns began to blow and cow bells to ring, up and down the streets. Bonfires were lighted at frequent intervals. Everywhere pandemonium was let loose.

It was generally understood that Bartley was in Chabington's hotel; but during the latter part of the after-

noon no one had seen him in the barroom or elsewhere, although several of the bolder men in the crowd had gone in search of him. About eight o'clock he suddenly appeared at the door, the elder Chabington at his side endeavoring to hold him back. It was nearly an hour after sunset and the crowd outside did not recognize him at first in the dusk.

"Don't be a fool, Bart!" Chabington was urging him. "They're madder'n hornets out there, an' they're bound to hurt you. Better lie low 'till they go away."

The editor swore recklessly as he threw off his friend's hand.

"Let go of me! I'm not a baby. If anybody in that rabble tries to bother me, he'll get hurt. I've got to go to my office for some papers."

"Why not let Joe go for 'em? They'll mob you, sure as you live. You can't do anything in such a crowd."

But Bartley was in his most reckless mood. He pulled a revolver from his pocket and brandished it threateningly, as he shouted out to the crowd.

"Get out of my way there! I'm Bill Bartley, and I want to pass. The first fool that gets in my way will be shot!"

He dashed down the steps and through the waiting crowd, firing his revolver as he went to clear his path. Part of the crowd scattered; but Caleb Trimmer, who had been directly in front of Bartley, felt his hat carried away by the bullet and became doubly enraged. Instead of jumping to one side to let the rampant editor pass, he sprang upon him and bore him to the ground. This would have been the end of the chapter for the editor of *Chips* if Caleb had not lost his balance and fallen several paces beyond his quarry. Nimble as a cat, Bartley sprang to his feet again and raced on through the excited throngs which ran toward him from every side clamoring for his life.

"Hang him!" "Lynch him!" "Tar an' feather him!" "Ride him on a rail!" yelled the mob.

Sticks and stones began to rain upon him. Men with horsewhips sprang into the path ahead and, waiting until he came up, lashed him furiously. More than once he shot at his enemies, but the bullets, flying wild, served only to increase the rage of the mob. Bartley was now running for his life, the crowd following like a pack of hounds at his heels, hooting and yelling. Up Main Street he went, dodging at every few yards the men and boys who darted at him from doors and fence corners with sticks and whips. His speed and agility were wonderful. Suddenly a man ran across the sidewalk just ahead of him, holding a rope, one end of which he had fastened to the fence. Before he could pull it taut, another man sprang out of the shadow and with a quick blow of his fist knocked him down. Bartley, without stopping to see who his mysterious helper might be, vaulted clear of the loose rope and continued his course, uninterrupted, only to receive, a little further on, the contents of a big bucket of water emptied upon him from a second-story window. He staggered an instant, then, recovering himself, fired the last shot from his revolver into the window and dashed on. A scream rang out, announcing that a woman had been hit. Investigation showed that she had received only a flesh wound in the arm, but the cries for swift vengeance were redoubled. The gathering darkness was the only safeguard of the now thoroughly frightened editor. On he dashed, gaining his office at the corner of Benson and Main Streets scarcely a hundred feet ahead of his pursuers. For a moment they hesitated to enter the dark stairway for fear he might be lurking in some corner ready to shoot the first one who should venture within. When at last lanterns and torches were brought, Bartley had found refuge in his printing

room and locked the door. Feeling that they had him safe for the present, leaders of the mob retired to the sidewalk to wait and consult. Watchers were at once dispatched to cover every possible point of escape, although it was thought hardly likely that he would attempt to flee by the way of windows so high from the ground.

By this time, nearly the whole population of Midland was on the street and gathered around the building in which *Chips* was located. Some, even, of the more conservative citizens had yielded to the excitement and joined the mob, in several cases against the earnest objections of their better halves. Willis Lamson, for example, had gone home to supper intending to join his friends later, but his good wife did her best to dissuade him from being a party to any lawlessness, even against such a man as the editor of *Chips*.

"You did all your duty when you gave him warnin' to leave the town," she urged. "If he refuses to go, an' makes any more trouble, let the law take him in hand."

Her husband couldn't see it in that light. "The law won't take him in hand—that's just the trouble. The people have got to rise an' deal with him like they would with a mad dog runnin' loose."

Just then the tooting of horns and the yells of the mob came to their ears. Willis jumped to his feet and began pacing excitedly through the rooms.

"I must go, Sarah; I must go!" he exclaimed.

"You must stay here with me, Willis! Ain't you ashamed, chasing after one poor wretch like a lot o' wolves?"

"He's a skunk! We've got to hunt him out of town—after we give him a coat of tar an' feathers."

"Willis Lamson! It's wicked to talk like that! You put your hat down and stay right here!"

Another yell came through the open window, louder and fiercer than before.

"I *must* go, Sarah! I *am* goin'!" and he ran to the door.

"Willis! come back here!" cried his faithful spouse in tones of great excitement. "Come back here; you forgot something! If you really *must* go, wait till I git you an old feather pillow!"

Sam Hawkins was abroad with the turbulent throng that night, alert, watchful, as excited as any, but from a very different cause. He felt that a crisis had come and he must be ready to meet it. Now, if ever, was his opportunity, he told himself. He must not let it slip from his grasp. Oh, if only he had not waited too long! Bartley was certainly overwhelmed with disaster. He could not repel anyone who might offer him help. He could not refuse to listen to the voice of a deliverer. Once, yes twice, during the winter months, Sam had tried to approach his enemy, but had failed. Indeed, ever since the day Sam had resented his insults and knocked him down in the street with a blow of his fist, the editor had avoided him and even ceased to persecute him. It could not be that his fear had been aroused. Bartley had never shown fear of enemies seen or unseen. Twice Sam had tried to speak to him and Bartley had turned away from him. The young man had not been discouraged by these two failures; rather, they spurred him on. He had watched and waited for his chance. He had felt his whole attitude toward the man change, slowly but surely. Strangely enough, the change dated, not from the time of the cutter race when he had put himself in the place of Farineau and asked himself if he was showing the same spirit toward Bartley that the lawyer had shown to Joel Bailey, but from still further back when he had seen the editor

lying in the road at his feet. He had realized then for the first time that the man was actually down, while he, himself had been lifted up. The realization had not come instantly, but in the days and nights that had followed when he thought the matter over again and again. That one blow had seemed to satisfy all his desire for vengeance. Hatred died in his heart, and a real wish to lift the wretched man up, even as he himself had been lifted up, took its place. During the months that had followed, this wish grew stronger and became a purpose. Twice he had tried to accomplish it. With each failure his purpose had strengthened. He had continued to watch and wait, feeling sure that his time would come.

Tonight Sam Hawkins had stood with the crowd outside Chabington's hotel and had listened to the threats that were openly made against the editor. He had raced along full speed ahead of the pursuers when Bartley made his dash for the office. He had been the first to see the trap planned by the man who was stretching a rope across Bartley's path, and he had darted out of the darkness in time to knock the fellow down before the fugitive could be tripped. He had stopped long enough with the crowd at Bartley's door to make sure that no immediate assault would me made; then he had dashed away in search of help, if such a thing could be found where all seemed drunken with rage and bent upon the annihilation of their caged victim.

Jesse Brinton and Ned Jewel were in the former's private office in earnest consultation, while the mob in the street below was planning how to get possession of the editor of *Chips*, who had locked himself into his office across the hall. Mr. Brinton had sent Manny Matthews out to Oakdale several hours before to inform Mrs. Brinton that he would be kept in town by urgent

business until late. It was now eight o'clock. Brinton had just returned from Chabington's hotel to report the result of his errand. Ned had stayed at the office to wait for him.

"The woman has flown; no one seems to know or to care what has become of her; they're all too excited over Bartley. I met Jake Crawford coming from the hotel. It was he who told me. He declared that he had seen her slip out a back way, with her satchel, and hurry off. He seemed more excited over her than anyone else, though I can't imagine why. He couldn't tell who she was. I asked him particularly if he had any idea, and he swore he didn't know her from Adam's wife; but he was willing to bet she had left town. He thought probably she was frightened by the tumult over Bartley. There seems to be a strange belief abroad that she came here with him."

"Do you suppose she's really gone?"

"We can only wait and see. If she hasn't, you'll hear from her tomorrow. If she has, its pretty good proof that she's afraid of something and isn't likely to make good her threat. We'll soon know. Meanwhile, something must be done at once about Bartley. The crowd is in a very dangerous temper. I'm afraid they'll lynch him if they get hold of him."

"'Twould be a fitting end for the beast!"

"Shame on you, Ned! I'm surprised to hear you talk like that. Lynching is a crime—it's murder, even if the victim is a criminal. We can't have our town disgraced by such a thing."

"I don't see what we have to do with it; we don't need to join the mob. Bartley's brought the thing on himself."

"Never mind if he has; we've got to find some way to stop it. If there were some definite charge on which he could be arrested and punished lawfully, I'd say, by

all means go ahead, but even that would be a difficult thing to do with the people wrought up to such a frenzy. They'd be liable to snatch him from the constable and hang him to the nearest tree."

"It looks as if they'd have their own way, then. He's cornered, and the mob is all around the place."

"Ned Jewel, we've got to get that man away somehow. I want you to rouse yourself and help me. I stayed down here to help you, and I've done all I could; now you're going to help me, and no fuss about it. I'm determined that Midland City shan't disgrace itself by lynching that fellow, no matter how bad he is. Are you with me?"

"Why, certainly, Mr. Brinton. I'll do anything you say; but I'm just wicked enough to wish I was with the fellows down stairs. What is it you want me to do?"

Brinton sat for several minutes in a brown study. "I wonder if you could find Sam Hawkins," he said at length.

"I should think that would be easy. He's likely to be with the crowd below," replied Ned.

"On the contrary, that's the one place he's least likely to be, in my opinion," said Brinton; "but I wish you'd try to find him and get him here at once. Every minute counts. Better run around to his house. Hold on a minute," he cried, as Ned started out of the door, "see if you can pick up Joe Chabington, too, and bring him with you. It may be necessary to give him a hint of what is wanted, because he and his father are friends of Bartley. Don't let anyone imagine he's with you, though. He'll have to slip up alone the best way he can."

Ned hurried away. No one interfered with him, because he was known as a hater of Bartley. Indeed, any of *The Pioneer* staff would be counted on for sympathy if not actual help in the movement against the editor

of *Chips*. In the middle of the street a huge bonfire had been built, and an iron kettle of tar, suspended from a rough tripod of green saplings over the middle of it, was already beginning to smoke. The crowd hurrying hither and thither or standing around the fire, the crackling of burning wood, the clouds of sparks, the shouting, the tooting of horns, the ringing of cow bells, together with the glare and smoke from the fire and the torches made the whole scene as suggestive of the infernal regions as could well be imagined. Ned pushed his way through the crowd, avoiding recognition as much as possible. Just outside the glare, watching with a furtive look all that was going on, he ran into Joe Chabington. The young fellow darted away, as though to escape some hostile act, but Ned sprang after him and caught him by the arm.

"Sh! Wait a minute! I want to speak to you. Let's get out of this mob first."

Wondering and suspicious, Joe went on with Ned until out of sight and hearing from the crowd.

"Joe, Mr. Brinton has gotten it into his head that the mob means to lynch Bartley when they get hold of him, and I guess he's about right. For some reason or other, or at least because he thinks such a thing would disgrace the town, he's bent on getting the fellow off—helping him to escape. I don't know how he's going to do it, but he told me to find you and send you up to his office. You'll have to get up somehow without arousing suspicion—and hurry.

"Good for him! I'd never o' thought it!" exclaimed young Chabington, and he at once made his way back toward the fire.

"I'll bet Sam is there in the crowd, ready for a hand in the tar pot," muttered Ned as he turned off in the direction of Ashman Street. "He has as big a score to settle as anyone in this town."

At Sam's house he was informed that Hawkins had just been there and left to go in search of Ned Jewel himself. "He went down to Mrs. Plimpton's only about ten minutes ago. You can catch him if you hurry," said Lettie. The poor girl was trembling with excitement and fear, but Ned could say nothing to reassure her. He ran to his boarding house, and met Sam coming from the door.

"Thank goodness!" exclaimed the latter; "I was afraid I wasn't going to find you. I suppose Mr. Brinton went home?"

"No, he didn't; he's at the office, and he sent me to find you."

"Good enough! That's better than I expected. We'll have to hurry if we're going to get Bartley away. I heard several men saying they would smash the door in when the tar is ready."

"You don't mean to say you want to get him off, do you?" exclaimed Ned.

"Certainly! Hurry up!"

By the time the three young men succeeded in reaching the office of *The Pioneer*, one at a time to avoid attracting attention, Mr. Brinton had his plan all thought out. To the south, or rear of the building, which faced the north on Main Street, was a small back yard, a sharp bank, and the tracks of the F. & P. M. Railroad. Beyond the tracks was another steep bank running to the Tittabawassee River. On the east side was an empty lot and then Benson Street, running north and south. At the foot of Benson Street, a long covered bridge extended over the river. On the west side of the building was an apple orchard forming a part of the private grounds of a family nearby. The orchard extended to the railroad tracks. To the south and west were lumber yards and mills, and still farther in the same direction lay Sam Hawkins's salt works. Watchers had

been stationed with lanterns on the railroad above and below Benson Street, and also at the bridge, to prevent Bartley's escape by those natural points of egress.

Brinton lost no time in putting his plan in action. He had already made two stout ropes, some twenty-five feet long, by twisting together the heavy cords from his bundles of paper. The crowd was growing noisier below. If they intended to break into Bartley's office they might come rushing up the stairs at any moment. Just now the dark hall was deserted.

"Joe, I want you to get into the other room with Bartley at once. He'll let you in when he hears your voice. Change clothes with him as quickly as you can. When you're ready, let me know and one of us will come in and help Bartley let you down by the rope from his window—the one farthest back from Main Street on the side toward Benson. Ned will be on the street watching. It's dark, and they're not likely to see you at first. When you are safely on the ground, make a dash down Main Street for Chabington's hotel. Ned will see to it that the whole mob follows. He will point to the rope as proof of Bartley's escape. If they see you, the clothes will deceive them. Keep them in ignorance as long as you can to give us a chance with Bartley."

The young man hesitated. "That's all very well; but suppose they give me a coat of tar and feathers, or swing me up to a tree?"

"There's no danger of that, when they find out you're not the right man. You're willing to take some risk for a friend, aren't you?"

"Sure, if it ain't too big a one."

"It's Bartley's only chance; you'll have to be quick," urged Brinton with some impatience.

"All right, here goes," and Joe disappeared into the darkness.

"Slip down stairs, Ned and do your part," said Brinton, and he and Sam stood at the doorway waiting the signal from the next office. Every moment was fraught with danger. The light and noise in the street had attracted everybody thither, but each instant the possibility increased that someone might come upstairs on a tour of inspection, or the mob might grow tired of waiting and make a sudden raid on the office of *Chips*. The risk young Chabington had accepted was much greater than he realized. Indeed, it was a risk for all concerned. Discovery a moment too soon of the man on the rope would spoil the whole plan and bring the indignation of the crowd upon those who helped. Even if Joe should get away at the start, they might catch him before he had gone far enough, and, discovering the fraud, return in time to prevent the escape of the real fugitive.

A low, hurried call came from Bartley's door. Mr. Brinton and Sam tiptoed across the hall into the other room which was partially lighted by the glare from the street below. Joe Chabington let them in. He was dressed in Bartley's well-known dandified clothes. The editor crouched by the open window in the southeast corner of the room. His race for life less than an hour ago, the threatening yells of the crowd below his windows, all of which had been smashed in by missiles thrown by the mob; the sight and smell of the burning tar, and the sight of a coil of rope which one man carried conspicuously on his arm and held to view at frequent intervals—all these had completely broken the nerve of the wretched man, and he had given up peeping out of his front windows, hiding himself instead in the corner of the room farthest removed from the street glare and the flying missiles. He eyed both the newcomers suspiciously as the light fell on their faces. Joe had not told him who were behind the scheme to help

him escape, and he supposed it was Chabington and Farineau. Now he suspected a trick and held back. Sam tried to reassure him in hurried words.

"I'm not your enemy, Bartley. Mr. Brinton and I are going to get you out of the clutches of that howling mob. To prove it—do you remember the fellow who tried to trip you up with a rope? I knocked that chap down just in time. Come now, hurry! They may be up here any minute."

There was no gainsaying the last statement, and Bartley decided that the uncertain was, at least for the immediate present, better than the certain. He took hold with nervous haste and helped lower Joe from the window. Fortunately, the fire was far enough above the Benson Street side of the building to throw the wall into the shadow. Joe held on to the rope with his hands, ready to let go as soon as he was near enough to the ground. In a moment the rope slackened, and a dark figure darted away from the wall and gained the street. At the same instant shouts went up from the crowd.

"There he goes! Bart's escaping! He jumped from the window! No, he came down on a rope! Catch him! Catch him!"

Like a pack of hounds after the fox, the crowd dashed down Main Street after the flying figure. The sentries on the railroad track and at the bridge, believing their duty done, followed after the rest. Not one remained.

"Quick! Come into my room!" exclaimed Brinton. "No, leave that rope there and the window open. We don't want them to know anybody was here except Joe. Another rope is ready at my window."

"You may as well go down by the stairway; everybody's gone," said Ned, coming back from the street.

"No, it would be too much risk," replied Brinton. "Someone may be watching—the crowd may be back sooner than we expect. Hurry! This way!"

In a twinkling they were at the west window overlooking the orchard.

"Sam, you go down first and be ready to take Bartley through the lumber yards to the Salt works. Ned, you skip down the stairs and take Zeke and the buckboard around to the Salt works and turn them over to Sam. I'll take care of this rope and lock up the office. Quick! I think I hear them coming back."

"No, they're not," said Ned, listening. He marveled greatly at Sam's willingness, his anxiety, even, to rescue Bartley. All at once he began to feel ashamed of his own vindictive temper, and to enter more heartily into the work.

Sam was on the ground, and Bartley followed without delay, ready now to obey the least command. In a moment Mr. Brinton was alone. He quickly drew in the rope and hid it in his desk. Then he closed and fastened the window, locked up his office, and hastened down to the street. He looked at his watch. It was scarcely nine o'clock. Hours seemed to have passed since he came back from his errand to the hotel. With a sigh of relief, he walked away to the stable where Kris was waiting to take him back to Oakdale.

In front of Chabington's hotel all was tumult and savage threatenings. The mob demanded Bartley. Ben Chabington, the proprietor, came to the door and declared with oaths that Bartley was not there.

"You're a liar! We saw him go in!" yelled the angry crowd.

"You can yell until you split, you won't get him, 'cause he ain't here," insisted Chabington.

'Come on, boys—a dozen of you—come with me! we'll fix him!" cried old Cap. Walton, and he hurried away with his volunteers.

A quarter of an hour or so later they returned dragging the old iron cannon which was used for Indepen-

dence Day salutes. Then the excitement of the crowd went from fever heat to the point of delirium. A hoarse yell greeted the formidable weapon.

"Load her up, boys, with blanks!" cried Cap. Walton, and in a jiffy it was done.

Another demand was made on Chabington, but he cursed the messengers and slammed the door in their faces.

"Bang!" went the old cannon, shattering the windows of the hotel, while the shouts of the mob supplemented the noise of the bombardment.

"Load her again!" shouted Cap. Walton; "an' put in a charge o' that gravel, pointing to a sand screen standing in the light of a bonfire.

Chabington appeared in the doorway with a heavy revolver in each hand. His face was livid with rage.

"Bartley ain't in this buildin'," he shouted; "but if he was, you couldn't have him. The first man who tries to enter, or to damage my hotel has got to chew bullets!" and he pointed his revolvers straight at Cap. Walton.

"Tommy rot!" responded the old soldier. "Boys, just stand aside while I talk to him." Stepping closer to the hotel steps, Cap. Walton gave the hotel manager bluff for bluff.

"Get out o' there! If you don't want to be blown clean into the middle o' the Tittabawassee, put down them arms an' surrender. I'm goin' to count three to give you time to do it. After that your blood'll be on your own head. We're goin' through your shebang whether you like it or not. Be ready, boys! One! Two!—" Before "three" could be called Chabington surrendered, and the mob ransacked the hotel from cellar to garret; but no sign of Bartley could they find.

CHAPTER XXXIX

Two men stole quickly through the little orchard whose shadows hid them from the glare of the bonfire in the street. Over the fence and across the railroad tracks they scrambled like thieves in the night. The next moment they were swallowed up in the darkness and narrow, irregular passageways of the lumber yards.

Sam gave his instructions now and then in short, masterful sentences. The other man obeyed without a word of protest or questioning. The night was clear and mild, but the only light to guide them came from the myriads of twinkling stars. On they pressed, in nervous haste, past the mills and around towering piles of boards, over another fence, on to the clearing in which the Hawkins Salt works were located. At the edge of the road, in the darker shadow of the trees, Sam stopped.

"The buckboard will be here in a minute," he said briefly. Then Bartley spoke for the first time.

"Where are you going?"

"Bay City."

"Tonight? That's eighteen miles."

"I know; but anywhere nearer wouldn't be safe. They'll be out with their fast rigs as soon as they find out how they've been fooled. At Bay City you'll be in better shape to give them the slip. Nobody's likely to go as far as that."

Bartley was silent. He was also greatly mystified. Ned, with Brinton's horse and buckboard, came dashing

down the road. Without a word he handed the lines to Sam and walked away.

"Please stop at the house and tell Lettie not to wait up for me," Sam called after him.

Avoiding the vicinity of the railroad depot, and the State road, Sam skirted the village on the south, going westward to the upper bridge, and northward on the Sturgeon road from whence he turned off upon the first road running east to the Bay City road above Oakdale. This roundabout way afforded the only sure escape from the pursuers, now gathering at the eastern end of the village. Nothing was said by either of the men until Zeke settled down for his eighteen mile run to the east. Bartley, however, was decidedly ill at ease. He moved restlessly in his seat and more than once seemed on the point of speaking, but gave utterance only to short exclamations under his breath. Sam was no more ready to begin the conversation. Actions were speaking eloquently for him. Let his enemy listen to them for awhile and search for their meaning. At length Bartley could restrain his curiosity no longer.

"Well, what's your game?" he asked. "You may as well tell me now."

"There's no game," said Sam. "You were in a tight hole, and we're trying to get you out of it."

"But that seems mighty queer. I'd sooner expect to see you leading the mob. There's never been any love lost between us. You must have something up your sleeve."

Sam's heart began to beat more rapidly. He caught his breath as, in an instant, he recognized the crisis. Without stopping to arrange his thoughts or choose his words, he burst out passionately:

"No, I'm trying to pay my debt!"

"What? I don't understand."

"I suppose not; but I want you to. I wanted to tell

you before; but I couldn't; I was too much of a coward. This may be my last chance. I'd never forgive myself if I let you go now without telling you."

"Well, for heaven's sake, what is it?"

Zeke trotted on and on through the night at a pace of his own choosing. The gloomy forests and the wide expanse of farmlands along the road, the twinkling stars overhead, the mild breeze of Spring, the peaceful quiet, interrupted only by the peeping notes of the young frogs, and the steady beat of the horse's hoofs all were unnoticed by the two men in the buckboard. In short, nervous, disconnected sentences, in a manner awkward and embarrassed, but breathless with eagerness and throbbing with sincere purpose, Sam poured out his unstudied appeal to the elder man. He told him how, when, three years ago, he had been in a wretched plight through his own wickedness, when everybody despised him, when he was overwhelmed with disgrace and punishment, a man had come to him and held out his hand to lift him up, and had showed him where he could get rid of his terrible load of wickedness and find love and forgiveness. He begged Bartley not to think he was trying to preach to him; because he wasn't; he was only telling him the truth and explaining his debt. The man who had helped him had himself been in desperate need years before and had received the same kind of help that he brought to Sam. It was something that must be passed along from one to another. Sam had received it. It was his debt which he must pay by bringing the same help to Bartley. He was sure if Bartley would accept it, some day he also would have a chance to pass it on to some other fellow in need.

For awhile the editor listened quietly to the young man whom he had so long sought to injure. He did not attempt to interrupt him, although at first a muttered

curse expressed his impatience. As Sam told frankly of his long struggle to overcome his feeling of hatred for Bartley, so that he might be ready to offer him the precious thing which he himself had received, and as he urged him to believe that not a trace of that hatred remained, and that he was glad of the chance to be of service to Bartley, the latter seemed about to speak, but changed his mind and remained silent. At length Sam, too, relapsed into silence, unwilling to make any further appeal unless his companion should give him some encouragement.

"I guess there's no use bothering with me. I haven't got the makings of a saint in me. That part of my education has been badly neglected," remarked Bartley after a brief pause.

"Every man—"

"Never mind, Hawkins, you've said enough. As far as I can remember, this is the first sermon I ever listened to. You may be sincere enough, although I always did think you were a hypocrite, as I said. I'm willing to take that much back if it will make you feel better. There's one thing sure, you've got more sand than I gave you credit for."

Sam waited for a few minutes for Bartley to explain his last remark, but nothing was forthcoming. He felt disappointed and discouraged at the flippant way in which the man treated his earnest advances. He knew he had made a failure; but he really had been sincere, and had done his best. What more could he do? He wasn't such a man as Robert Allen.

"I suppose I'd better not go back to Midland after this kick up," Bartley was saying. "They don't seem to want me there."

This was a statement which Sam could not dispute, so he said nothing.

"I guess I'd better find a more congenial climate."

Sam allowed this remark also to go without response.

"By the way, what struck Brinton and Jewel to take a hand in this escape of the wicked editor? Are they paying debts, too?"

"Mr. Brinton is a good man—that's why he did it!"

"Humph! you leave out Jewel."

"Ned Jewel is a good man, too; but he didn't want to help at first."

"Well, I thought it was hardly natural for all of you to be so meek and forgiving. Of course I don't mean that it wasn't lucky for me. I guess I forgot to thank you for your trouble."

"It was nothing, if only—"

"If only I'll be converted, to pay for it, you mean. Well, I can't just now; I'm too busy. I'll take it under careful consideration when I succeed in finding a quiet place 'free from the madding crowd.'" Then he added quickly, to shut off Sam's protest, "I might square things a little, I suppose, before I drop out of sight. You've thought all along that I broke into the Post Office and stole a letter belonging to you, haven't you?"

"It did look that way," admitted Sam.

"Well, looks are very misleading sometimes. Other people think I did it, and Nell Tompkins thinks she has clear proof of it; but the fact is, I had nothing to do with the robbery, and didn't know about it until after it happened. I do know the fellows who did it, however, and I met them that same morning, as I said in *Chips*. One of them gave me your letter, or at least I took it from him. The fellows happened to be friends of mine, so I did the best I could to throw the sleuths off the track. I suppose it would be rather hard to convince anybody that I didn't run that job if I was accused of it, without telling on the real perpetrators. Nell was able to hold me up several times on the strength of that."

"Do you want me to tell Miss Tompkins?"

"Oh, no, she wouldn't believe it, now that she has her mind made up. But there's one other thing you might straighten out, since I guess it's been worked to the limit. Ned Jewel has been worried a good deal, lately, on account of his wife."

"His wife?"

"Oh, yes, I suppose you didn't know he was a married man? He's kept it quiet ever since he came to Midland. He had a wife in Detroit some five or six years ago; but she left him for a handsomer man after a few months of wedded blister with Jewel. I guess he never saw her after that. The past six months or so he's been getting letters from her, which no doubt interfered with his peace of mind. I believe a woman came to Chabington's hotel today to follow up those letters, but for some reason or other, she skipped right after supper."

"That woman was Ned Jewel's wife?"

"No, not quite. His wife has been dead something over four years. I guess he can find the record of her burial down in Flint, Genesee County."

"But the letters—and the woman today?"

"Oh, an intimate friend of the runaway wife, the handsomer man himself, in fact, who happened to have a lot of her love letters, and also a pretty knack of imitating handwriting, sent the letters for purposes unnecessary to mention, and also arranged with the woman who came to town today. There was some kind of mutual understanding between them; it doesn't matter what. We won't go into that part; but you might let the young fellow know where to find the records of his wife's death. It may compensate him for his trouble tonight."

"But how do you know all this?" exclaimed Sam.

"Well, really, modesty forbids me to explain any more in detail. The only thing that concerns Jewel is the

fact that his truant wife is safely under the sod. By the way, what do you suppose those jovial rioters will do with my office property?"

"I don't know. They were threatening to destroy it."

"I was afraid so. I'll tell you what you might do, if you can get back in time to prevent the sport. I borrowed a little money from Jewel on several occasions recently. He may need it, and I don't quite feel like parting with my ready cash, which, thank goodness, the rabble can't get. Since there doesn't seem to be much chance that I can realize on the printing office outfit, you might tell Jewel to sell the stuff off and reimburse himself for the money he so kindly let me have. Then I guess I can rest easy without fearing the appearance of a collector some fine day in my new home. I'll give you a written authorization when we get to Bay City."

During the long ride homeward in the early hours of the morning Sam was busy with tumultuous thoughts. His feeling of discouragement over Bartley's reception of his advances was almost forgotten in the astonishment which the man's revelations had caused him. He knew nothing of Ned's love for Bessie; but he could well imagine what a vital thing it must be to Ned in any event to know of his wife's death. And those last mysterious letters to which Bartley had referred with characteristic flippancy—and that woman who had come and gone so suddenly! There must be something a great deal more serious in the situation than Sam knew. Ned's whole life might be affected; and none of this would have been told if Sam had not tried to pay his debt. How little he had imagined that another's destiny was wrapped up so closely with the performance of his own duty. But what a poor performance it was after all. Bartley had actually treated his earnest words as a joke. Could such a failure be called a performance of duty? Parson Allen had assured him that a fellow

wasn't responsible for the result if he did his part as well as he could. Surely he had done that. Nothing remained for him but to leave the poor effort in the hands of the one power able to do " impossible " things. It was with a lighter heart, a more confident bearing, and an excited longing for the coming day that Sam Hawkins entered his own home not many hours before dawn.

CHAPTER XL

May was surely the most beautiful month in all the year to Ned Jewel. When he had given this as his opinion a year ago, he had been under the spell of the vernal woods. He had been delighting in the delicate freshness of the new foliage, the tender green of the soft grass in the meadow, the sweet wild flowers, the moist fragrance of field and woodland, the full streams, and the singing of the Spring birds. May seemed to him the birthday month of the outdoor world, and his senses drank in all these pleasant, exhilarating influences with relish and refreshment. Bessie had told him that, to her, the charm of May lay in the promises it held of glorious things to come. But what had he really known of the delights of May, after all? Its beauty had been a sealed book to him until now, notwithstanding his springtime sentiments and his admiration for the unfolding of Nature. Now, for the first time, he felt his heart atune to the singing of the birds. Now his spirit seemed to grasp the joyful evidences on every hand of spring triumphant over frost. The snows of winter had been driven away by the genial smiling of the sun. The bleak cold winds that had mourned with him in the solitude of the little valley had been hushed to silence, and now soft zephyrs from the south breathed their warm whisperings in his ear. All Nature was alive and throbbing with his own story. May was the month in which *he* had begun to live; it was the month which held for *him* promises of glorious things to come.

Two days Ned Jewel had been away from Midland to hunt up proof of Bartley's amazing story, and the proof had not been hard to find. Bitterness and hot

anger had raged like a tempest for awhile, but the songs of the bluebirds and the gentle, persuasive whisperings of the warm south wind in the trees stilled the tempest and filled his heart with joy and eagerness.

It was early morning of the third day since Bartley went away. Ned had gladly accepted the week's vacation Brinton had offered him, and now he was walking on the Westman road toward the sand ridge and the little valley of the beaver dam. He had no wish to go to the farm house at present, and therefore Zeke had been left behind in the stable. There was ample time for the walk. At a certain hour Bessie would be at the trysting place—he hoped. Would Brinton tell her as he had promised? Would she come? Both of these questions Ned asked himself again and again, and each time answered them as his hope prompted. His buoyant spirit was not content with his usual sedate walk, and put a spring into his steps that had been lacking for years. At intervals he ran and leaped like a schoolboy. When a bluebird close to the roadside burst into song Ned exclaimed "Bless his little heart!" and laughed aloud in excess of joy as he thought of a blue-clad song-bird he had first seen a year ago.

What mattered now the unspeakable villainy which had caused him so much suffering in the past. As well cherish in the memory a horrid nightmare when the morning sun drives away the turbid dream. The present and the future held out to him so much of joy that it would be madness to turn back to clutch at the wretchedness of the past. But he could not help shuddering as he thought how nearly he had lost the former—how nearly the latter had fastened itself upon him for all time. If Sam had failed to do as his conscience had impelled, the truth might never have been revealed. And Ned, himself, had actually tried to turn Sam away from his chosen course!

Just ahead was the sand ridge and the western boundary of Oakdale. All thoughts of Bartley and of Sam vanished as Ned reached the strip of woodland through which he had stolen secretly so many times in the dead of winter. Now all was changed again. The delicate green of the new foliage, and the cool fragrant smell of the woods were as they had been on that first visit with Bessie. As he came out upon the wild meadow he saw the same bright stretch of sweet flowers and tender grass with the laughing brook winding its way into the little valley. There, too, was the beaver dam just within the woods. The pond was full, and the running water fell in a plenteous shower to the brookbed below the dam.

Ned stood fascinated with the memories which filled the place—the memories of love awakening but not yet fully conscious; of love aroused and throbbing, only to find itself hopeless, forbidden; of love telling its sad story to the wintry winds and the shifting snow flakes; of a despairing love, lingering too long with its wintry repetition and betraying itself as a trespasser at last —ah! but not "at last!" Another chapter remained to be told, and Ned felt that it would not contain the words "trespass" and "hopeless."

Hark! The voice of a gay song-bird came from the west meadow to the waiting man. His heart leaped within him. He had heard that song-bird the day he first came to the beaver dam. Rich, sweet, and full of gladness, the song swelled out from the beautiful throat of the singer. Then suddenly it stopped at the edge of the woods. It was a woman who came tripping lightly, confidently, expectantly through the sun-spangled shadows. Ned sprang to meet her. One joyful, eager cry burst from him—

"Bessie!—I love you!"

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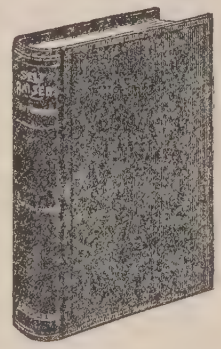

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